Weird Tales

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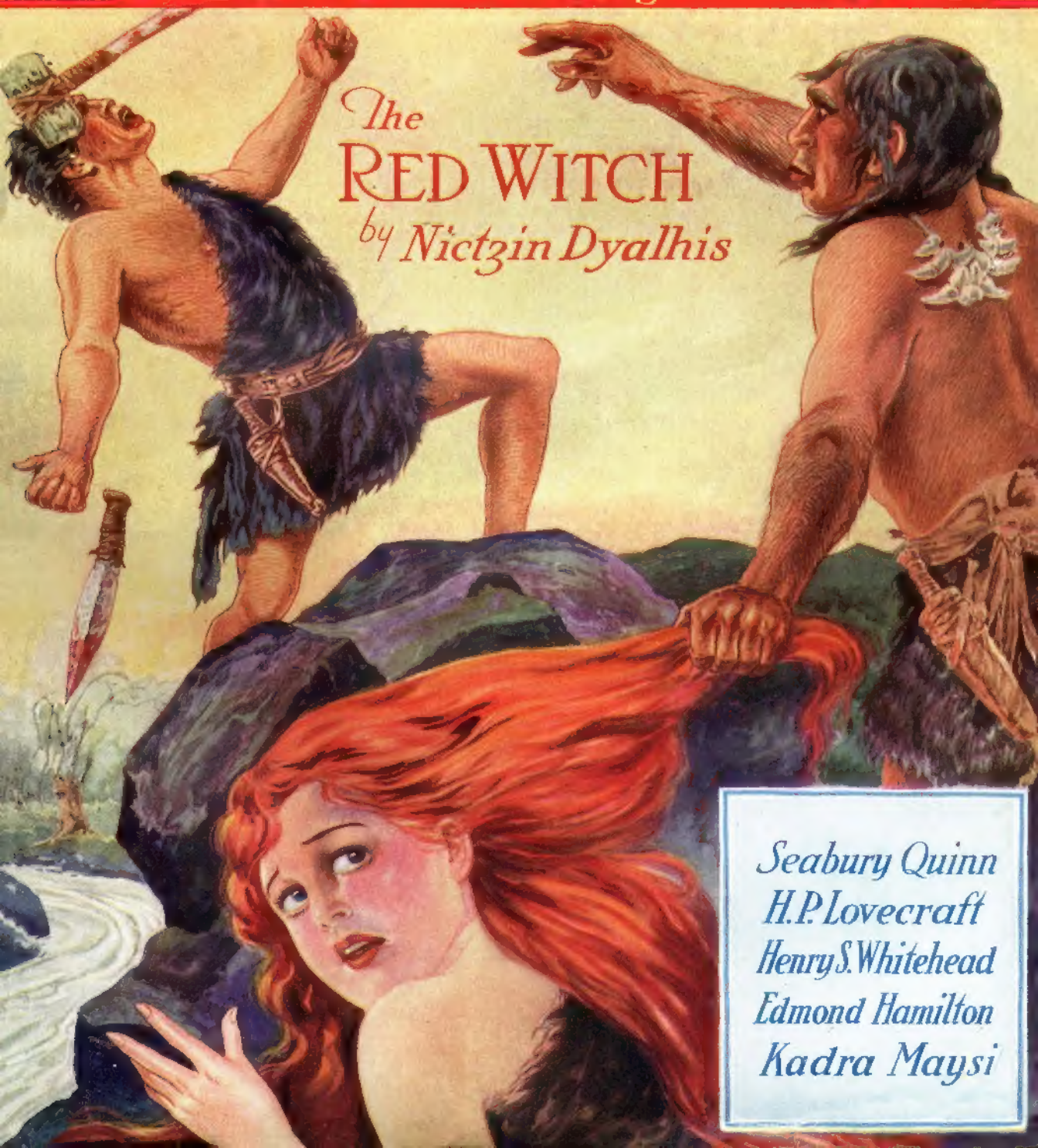

The RED WITCH by Nictzin Dyalhis

Seabury Quinn
H.P. Lovecraft
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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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THE reprint serial story, *The Wolf-Leader,* by Alexandre Dumas, *fils,* has proved so popular that we have decided to print another famous weird serial, beginning in our next issue. We were undecided whether to offer you *Dracula* or *Frankenstein,* but decided on the latter story because it is much shorter than *Dracula* and also because fewer of our readers have read *Frankenstein.* The installments will not be long, except the first one, in next month's issue, which gets the reader well into the story. But we want to let you decide whether we shall continue printing serials as reprints. Do you want us to go ahead and offer *Dracula* and other weird novels to you after *Frankenstein* is concluded? Or do you want us to confine our reprints to short stories? Or shall we print in this department only stories that have appeared in earlier issues of WEIRD TALES? Or shall we discontinue reprints entirely? We put the matter in your hands, and will do whatever you wish us to do in this matter.

The February issue, which is still on the stands as this issue goes to press, has elicited much favorable comment from you, the readers. Writes Julius Schwartz, of New York City: "I think this is the best issue you have ever published, and I've read WEIRD TALES as far back as May, 1924. It is very hard to pick the best story. However, I guess that it belongs to Quinn's *The Devil's Bride.* Hamilton's superb yarn, *The Three from the Tomb,* is the second best. What a story that was! Special mention must be made of *Night and Silence* and *The Tree-Men of M'Bwa.* When shall we hear from Greye La Spina, Nictzin Dyalhis, Eli Colter, and Arthur J. Burks again?" [Nictzin Dyalhis appears in this issue. A startling long story by Greye La Spina will be published complete in the June issue.—THE EDITORS.]

In a letter from New Brighton, New Zealand, G. W. Hockley writes to the Eyrie: "I must say a few words in reference to the high quality of the verse in the magazine. Lovecraft's series, *Fungi from Yuggoth,* contained some masterpieces of outré poetry. *Antarktos* is surely one of the weirdest pieces of verse ever written, conveying in a few lines chill suggestions of unthinkable antiquity. Robert E. Howard's remarkable *Song of a Mad Minstrel* also plumbs the depths of the bizarre and grotesque. His *Black Chant Imperial* is also one of his best pieces of work. Dealing with the subject of reprints, I would again urge you to give us more of the best stories from the older issues of WEIRD TALES in your reprint department. There are so many stories of which we have heard so much but which we are not able to obtain, such as *The Night Wire, Bells of Oceana,* and *The Canal,* and the earlier Lovecraft stories."

"I want more chilling ghost stories," writes Hyman Vinunsky, of Cleveland. "I

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mean you don't print enough of them. Have the author who wrote the serial *The Black Master* write you another one. That serial was wonderful. *The Devil's Bride* has started out great, and I know it will end that way, as Seabury Quinn is always high quality."

Kirk Mashburn writes from Houston, Texas: "In all courtesy, I disagree with Mr. Paul S. Smith's criticism, printed in the Eyrie of the February issue, of Robert E. Howard's yarn, *The Dark Man.* The entire plot of this story, and a considerable part of the action—the *adventure*—pivots on the active intervention of the Dark Man himself. By implications so strong as to leave the reader no alternate solution, the author justifies the Picts in believing the spirit of their ancient king to inhabit the image *and give it personality.* In other words, for the purpose of the story, the belief is fact. This is certainly a fantastic note, to put it mildly. I believe your readers, in the main, agree with me in liking Mr. Howard's stories not only for their own sake, when they run in the vein of *The Dark Man,* but because they make an admirable and harmonious foil to frankly supernatural or horror stories. I would like it understood that I express my personal liking for the story, without in any sense attempting or wishing to deny Mr. Smith's right to his own preferences."

A letter from Bruce Bryan, of Los Angeles, says: "I have just finished the February number, which is the best in a long time. I select Hamilton's story, *The Three from the Tomb,* as paramount. I certainly didn't suspect that this author could write so well. He has even learned to avoid the over-use of the word 'though,' which he worked to death in most of his past tales. I hesitated for a while between Hamilton's story and West's *The Laughing Duke. Night and Silence* was well told and the situation presented when the dead sister came to life was eery enough. I haven't read Quinn's or Leroux's serials yet, but am betting the de Grandin offering will draw all the votes. If Quinn wrote a story describing how the little Frenchman fried an egg it would probably be voted as the best in whatever issue it appeared."

"I consider the February issue the best you have edited for some months," writes Claude H. Cameron, of Toronto, Canada. "There are so many stories that appeal to me that it would be difficult to say just which ones I like best. However, I do wish to speak of one particular story, and that is *The Laughing Duke.* West has succeeded in getting that certain something into the tale that makes for realism."

Paul S. Smith, of Orange, New Jersey, writes to the Eyrie: "I thoroughly enjoyed the February number of WEIRD TALES. For out and out weirdness I think that *Devouring Shadows* by N. J. O'Neail tops the list; and this weirdness is due not only to the author's ideas but also to the powerful and skilful way in which he tells the story. Though *The Laughing Duke* by Wallace G. West is only slightly weird, it is such a splendid story and so breezily written, thoroughly likable and finely conceived that it is a decided asset to your February issue. Considered as a story pure and simple, this is one of the best things I have read in a long time. *The Three from the Tomb* by Edmond Hamilton is good throughout. Particularly ingenious is the villainous doctor's scheme to palm off the three living men as resurrected dead ones and thus gain control of the dead men's money."

"Why not ask the readers by referendum," suggests Millard Donachy, of River-

(Please turn to page 574)

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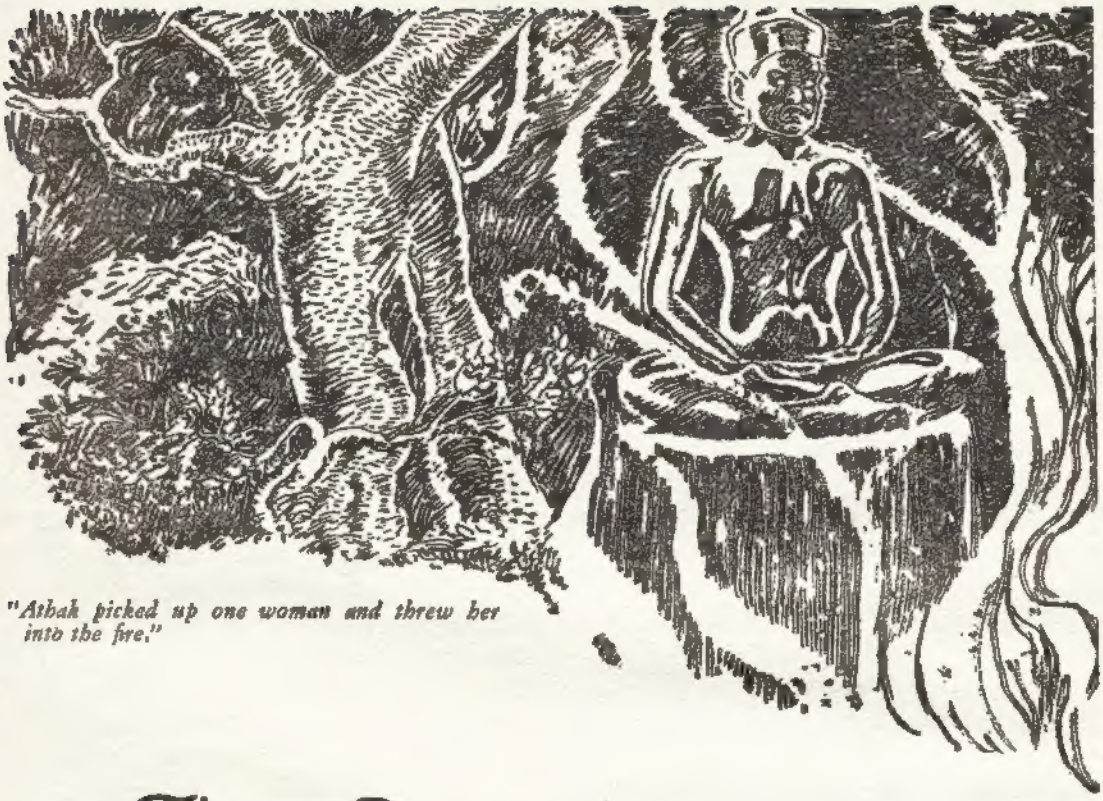


"Athak picked up one woman and threw her into the fire."

The Red Witch

By NICTZIN DYALHIS

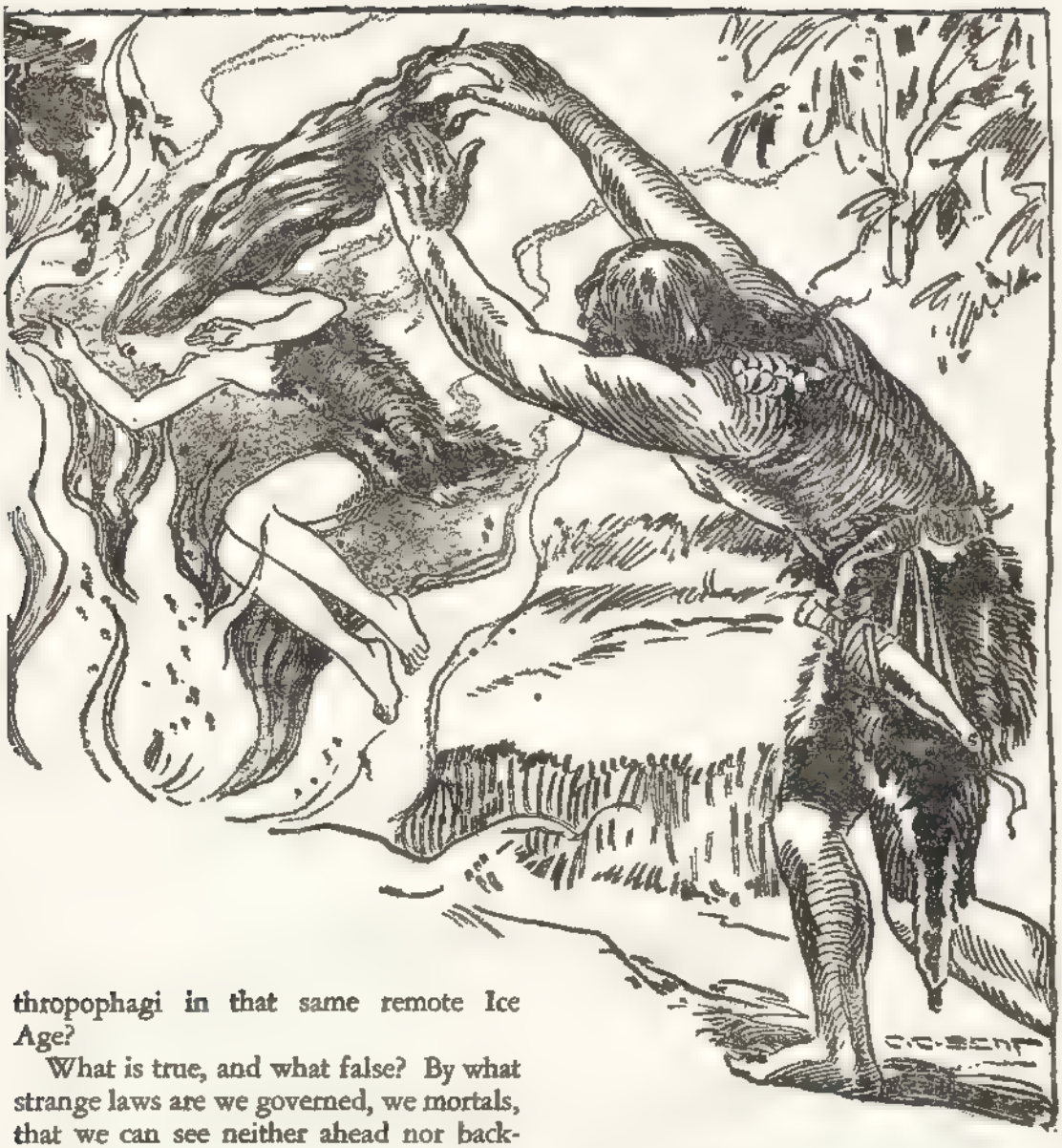
A tale of atavism, a thrill-story which links the past and present—a fascinating weird tale about a red-headed woman

IS THERE a past, a present, and a future; or are they in reality all the same state, being merely differing phases of the same eternal "Now"?

Are our lives and deaths and the interludes between them naught but illusion; and are we ever the same beings, yet capable, even though we do not recognize the fact, of experiencing two or more states of consciousness of personal identity—I mean, under certain exceptional conditions?

Times there are when my recent terrific experience impels me to adopt that hypothesis. How else may I explain the events wherein I played so strange a part —together with another who is far dearer to me than aught else in the universe?

Am I Randall Crone, a scientist connected with a great public museum, or am I Ran Kron, a youthful warrior of a savage tribe in the eon-old Ice Age? Is my wife, Rhoda—the gently nurtured, highly cultured Rhoda Day—the modern product of this Twentieth Century; or is she Red Dawn, the flaming-haired daughter of a red-headed witch-priestess of a devil-worshipping tribe of skin-clad An-



thropophagi in that same remote Ice Age?

What is true, and what false? By what strange laws are we governed, we mortals, that we can see neither ahead nor backward, and are only aware of a limited "Here"?

My brain reels as I seek to solve the mystery—and to what account? Truly has a great poet said:

> Of all my seeking, this is all my gain—
> No agony of any mortal brain
> Shall wrest the secret of the life of man,
> The search has taught me that the search is vain!

I FIRST saw her in the museum where I was on duty, and hard-headed scientist that I prided myself on being, I admit that my heart did a flip-flop, and I knew I beheld the one woman for whom I'd ever truly care. But that is a mild word for the love I felt. Love, I say; and I mean just that. In the holy emotion that possessed me there was no faintest throb of passion, no taint of desire. Beautiful? Yes, the most superbly beautiful woman on earth, I thought then, and still do think, and will continue so to think long after wrinkles and gray hair and decrepitude shall cause others to say "Old Hag", should that ever come to pass.

For soul has spoken to soul, and we twain know that we belong to each other; and though menaced as we were by the frightful ghost of the implacable savage chieftain, Athak the Terrible, yet we have overcome his menace, and no longer has he the power to afflict and harass our love and happiness through his eon-old malicious hatred.

Yet while he still had the power, he surely availed himself of it, measure full and running over; as my beloved knew from her early childhood up to the time we were married; and as I myself had several samples of, after that event; although, thanks to some benignant power, Athak's final attack was his undoing. But I am in danger of anticipating and must set down my account in a more logical sequence.

As I have said: I loved Rhoda Day from the first; and later I learned from her own lips that her feelings toward me were identical. At the time we neither of us knew why, but eventually we found out. Yet when I asked her to be my wife she burst into tears, sobbing:

"Oh, Randall, if only I could say 'Yes'; but—but—I—dare not!"

"Don't you care for me?"

"More than for life itself. . . ."

"Then why not—surely there must be some reason?"

"Oh, Randall, a terrible one. . . ."

"Tell me," I urged. But I coaxed for over an hour, holding her close in my arms, her head with its coronal of red-gold hair resting on my shoulder, her soft cheek against mine, before she finally gasped out her fears in broken phrases.

I'll not attempt to render her exact words. It simply can not be done. We both were in the grip of one of life's greatest emotions, or to be precise, a whole storm of emotions; and at such times I do not think that memory reproduces exactly. But in substance, thus the matter stood:

From a child, she'd been cognizant that, no matter where she was, or what she did, always there seemed to be another present, invisible, but very real nevertheless. A very terrible presence, too, inspiring her with loathing and dread, although it did not seem antagonistic to her welfare or her life. Rather it seemed to gloat over her with an air of proprietorship which she found indescribably horrifying.

Times there were when the presence exercised a very real power to protect her; as for example—when in her eleventh year she had a nerve-shaking experience with an ill-natured brute of a dog that snarled and menaced her with bared fangs. She knew, irrefutably, that the beast would have sprung in another moment, and stood paralyzed with terror, unable to cry out for help.

She sensed a storm of ferocious wrath sweep past her, enveloping the dog; and —unbelievable as it appears—that dog died! Yet on its body was evident no mark of violence. Apparently the brute died in a paroxysm of terror. But even after that episode, for a long while she had no idea as to what the Presence was.

As she grew older, she noted more frequently that that same power, or force, or influence, was exerting itself in her behalf to guard her—sometimes too zealously—a something too fiercely possessive, and capable of emitting a wave of such malignant hostility that she was for the most part devoid of the friends such as a young girl usually has.

And as she ripened into the first flush of young womanhood, drawn by her beauty there was no lack of young men who sought to do her homage and court her with their attentions—but none of them ever sought long. Doubtless, the

air of hostility they felt about her, enshrouding her like a garment, they attributed to her; believing her to be of a disagreeable, if not an actually repellent personality; instead of realizing that it was an alien nature, emanating from a source outside herself, and certainly quite apart from her desires.

At that same period she became aware that the Presence was even more strongly possessive in its attitude; and, worse, again and again it made her sense its proximity even in the sanctum of her own room. But up until the day we were assured of each other's feelings she had not seen the thing—whatever it was. That night, however, after retiring, she awoke with the hideous feeling of being not alone—awoke to see the two eyes staring down at her; eyes aflame with wrath; eyes set in a vague, nebulous blur that might or might not have borne the semblance of a human face.

OF COURSE she was frightened. Any one would be, under the same circumstances. She was so frightened that, try as she would to call out and arouse the household, she could emit no sound louder than a moan, barely audible to herself. She could not even move a muscle; could only lie still in an agony of apprehension, staring wildly up into the blazing orbs not a yard above her face.

Oddly enough, the apparition contented itself with glaring at her, striving to impress something on her mind, indelibly. All the impression conveyed, however, was that in some manner she had angered the "Thing", although how, or why, she could not comprehend.

But as we met more frequently, and our minds as well as our hearts became more filled with each other, the unholy visitant, appearing nightly, became more and more enraged. It was easier to see, assuming density of form and features with its rapidly growing wrath. After such visits she felt as if she had been beaten, physically, with a thick stick, wielded by a strong hand and arm.

Always it strove to impress upon her consciousness a very definite command, but always it failed to make its will register. Yet with each visit it became more visible until it was easily seen to be a huge man, long-armed and thick-legged, inclining more to the blond type than to the swarthy; skin-clad, carrying a huge knotted club, and a great stone-bladed knife stuck through a narrow leather thong tied about his middle.

"He—he—looks so—*savage,*" she shuddered.

I stared down at the lovely, tear-bedewed face, my mind in a queer jumble of commingled amazement and fear. Those wondrous blue eyes looked straight back into mine, reading my unspoken thought.

"Randall, my beloved," she said gravely, mastering her emotions with a superb manifestation of will-power, "it all sounds crazy enough, I know; but please do not think your Rhoda is crazy. *She isn't!* I know what I've been subjected to ever since I was old enough to remember anything."

Ashamed of my momentary suspicion, I hastened to make the only amends within my power.

"If you're crazy, then I'll go crazy, too," I stated seriously. "How soon will you marry me? You love me, and I love you. That being the case, to whom but me should you turn for sympathy, understanding, and protection; insofar as lies within my power to give them . . . why, Rhoda, what's a husband *good* for, if not to stand between his woman and the whole world, and the Powers of Hell, too, for that matter, if she needs his aid? Once married, we can be together at the very times when your danger is the great-

est. I don't know what I can do, if anything; but I'll guarantee that whatever this skin-clad giant is up to, he'll have me to dispose of before he harms you. I want you, and you need me, and that brings us back where we were—*How soon do we get married?"*

"Randall! Randall! Stop urging me, or you'll sweep me off my feet! I can not and will not let you become involved——"

"Try keeping me out," I defied, my whole being aflame with loving sympathy and pity. Suddenly over me swept an unalterable certitude—that I was already involved, fully as much as was she. Nay, more: I felt that I always had been; only until then I had not known it. But in that one moment I knew that my fate and Rhoda's were one and the same; and that whatever this being was which menaced, it was likewise a menace to me, and would be so forevermore, unless in some manner as yet unguessed by me I could put an end to its unholy machinations. So I told her of my sudden conviction, and when I'd concluded, I saw stark worship replace the fear-haunted expression in her eyes.

"Randall"—her voice was vibrant with all the love a good woman feels in her soul and can not express with mere words —"you'd dare that awful being, risk your life, perhaps your very soul for—me?"

"Risk my life, perhaps my soul, for you, Rhoda? Mine would be but a pitifully weak love if I hesitated to do so. I most certainly am going to do that very thing, if need be. Your troubles henceforth are my troubles too, so that's that! Now let's drop all this cross-purpose talk and talk sense for a while. I've already asked you to marry me, and now I'm saying it differently—we two are going to get married right now, at once, immediately, today! Get me? You've got absolutely nothing to say about it. *I'm* Boss, with a big 'B'! And how do you like *that?"*

"Oh, I—I—give up," she faltered. "Only you will simply have to wait at least a week. We've simply got to conform somewhat to the standard conventions and tell a few people; otherwise tongues are sure to wag, unfavorably."

I was too well pleased to argue. After all, that day or a week later, mattered but little. The monster had not slain her up till then, and had had plenty of time in which to have done so, had such been his purpose. So I let it go as she stipulated, with one amendment.

"If that 'What-you-may-call-it' reappears in your room, you tell him my name and address; try and make him comprehend *me,* then tell him to come and annoy *me* for a change and let you take a rest. I've an idea that I can cope with him. . . ."

THAT night things did happen!

Rhoda told me later what her experience was that night. Unpleasant, very, but fortunately brief; and in a way it was merely the preliminary to what I went through immediately afterward.

She had no sooner retired than the Thing appeared, seemingly more tangible than ever before. It made no attempt to actually molest her, but was obviously in a towering rage. It did everything but rave aloud. It stamped about the room, gnashing its teeth in a perfect frenzy; frowning and grimacing intimidatingly; shaking a huge fist in her face; pantomiming strangling her with its enormous hands; and plainly conveying through sheer force of wrath, that she'd gone to the ultimate limit of its patience. Above all, it made her understand that it was *jealous!* Which gave her her cue. It speaks well for her brave spirit that she

faced the ugly apparition with a smile of contempt, jeered at it, and demanded in a whisper:

"If you're jealous of Randall Crone, why don't you go and try to bully him, instead of acting like a coward by tormenting me all the time?"

To make a good job of it, she exerted all her will to picture me and my abode so clearly that he could catch her thought-images. And after a bit she succeeded; for a look of comprehension and hatred came over the savage features, and a second afterward the apparition vanished from her room.

I'D BEEN reading and at the same time hoping that the Thing would pay me a visit that night. I had no idea as to how to cope with it. I do not claim to be a great hero, but had the Devil himself threatened Rhoda's peace of mind, though he came to me with horns, barbed tail, talons all sharpened, cloven hoofs, flaming eyes, breathing sulfur fumes, and with his white-hot pitchfork raised to strike, still I would have fought him to the best of my ability and trusted to luck to defeat him somehow. But I didn't intend to be caught asleep and off guard if I could help myself. Hence I sat and read.

And it came!

The same huge, savage warrior that Rhoda had so graphically described. And the instant it assumed visibility, I knew that I was in for a most unpleasant time. The utter malignity of its expression proclaimed that here was a being to whom the very ideas of mercy, reason, or even caution, were completely unknown.

It had the power of rendering itself visible, but could not make itself audible, although had it spoken, I'd been none the wiser, for I could not have understood whatever uncouth language might have been its native tribal tongue. But it certainly could and did make its thoughts register on my brain. He—for there's no need to longer call the Thing "it"—warned me very emphatically that *he* owned that red-headed woman; had owned her since the world was young, and always would own her till long after the world died of old age; and that if I wanted to remain all in one piece I'd best never go near her again. All this was punctuated by flourishing an enormous knotted—spectral—club which he wielded in one huge fist.

I never did like being bullied!

And the more that infernal savage phantom raved, the less I liked it. A slow anger began to burn within me. I had my own ideas about his asserted ownership of Rhoda. I wasn't conceited enough to think that I owned her, but I was quite sure that *he* didn't! While as to me staying away from her simply because he bade me do so——

I came to my feet, "seeing red" literally, and hurled myself at him with all my inhibitions inherited from my civilized ancestry wholly in abeyance. I was fully as much a savage as ever he had been! My entire being was filled with but one desire—to get my hands, aye, my teeth even, to working on him; to batter, to rend, to tear, kick, bite, gouge, and strangle until he was——

Something seemed to burst within my skull; a terrific blaze of scarlet light which blinded me for a bit—in my ears was a roaring like to the four winds of the world colliding simultaneously—a queer rushing sensation as if I were hurtling through the boundless abyss of space——

I regained consciousness. . . .

I WAS in a village of some fifty-odd stone huts. Low round buildings they were, wherefrom smoke rose lazily into the air through holes in the high-pitched peak-roofs. It was late in the day, for the

long shadows stretched almost eastward. Skin-clad men and women moved about the huts. White of skin they were, the majority light-haired, with blue or gray eyes. The women for the most part were short, broad, stocky of build; none of them really bad-looking, yet none really comely, let alone any of them having even a remote approach to beauty. Their faces were too stolid, and their voices were too harsh to render any of them attractive.

The men were proportionately taller, equally as broad, their faces more savage in expression; and all, even in the comparative safety of their own village, were armed with various weapons—a stone knife in a skin girdle, or a short stone-headed spear carried in one brawny hand; or a stone ax; or a knotted club; but I saw no missile weapons such as bows and arrows or slings; nor did any of the warriors bear shields.

I saw myself as one of their number; knew myself as Ran Kron, a savage youth, a mere stripling not as yet a warrior; still untried, longing, yearning, looking eagerly forward to that time when I might stand with these hard-faced warriors in the whirl and tumult of a battle, that I might prove myself a man.

Wherefore I exercised at all the warlike pastimes and practises and in my spare time haunted the abode of old Juhor the Snake, the tribe's most highly skilled weapon-maker.

To return to this present time in which I now write—I realize how difficult it is to make plain just how I knew all this which I've just described. All that I can say is—I did know. The same difficulty is confronting me in regard to what now follows. I can only write it as I knew it to be occurring while I was living in that phase of my existence. I knew my own experiences. But I knew, too, the experiences of others, insofar as those were intertwined with my own. So from here on, for a while at least, I must write in the third person instead of the first person, singular. . . .

Juhor the Snake, old, bent, crippled, and incredibly wrinkled, looked up from his work of chipping and polishing at the head of a green-stone war-ax he was making. A crafty gleam shone, transient, in his one good eye, as he beheld the tribe's mightiest fighting-man passing some few yards from where he, Juhor, sat at the door of his stone hut.

"Ho, Athak, Great Warrior! Athak the Swift! Athak the Strong! Athak the Terrible! Come and see!"

The gigantic, frowning war-chief turned shortly and strode to where sat the tribal weapon-maker.

"Well?" he snarled.

Juhor the Snake indicated the well-nigh completed jade ax-head.

"What of that, O mighty one?" he asked with the pride of a master craftsman.

Athak inspected it critically, with the shrewd scrutiny of another master craftsman, which he was, albeit no weapon-maker but a user of them instead.

"Put a handle to it," he commanded.

"Not yet," Juhor objected. "It is too heavy for its size. No warrior could wield it for very long. In steady fighting it would soon tire the strongest arm."

"A lie," snarled the surly giant. "It could not tire *my* arm to use it through a whole day's steady fighting!"

"Not all men are as Athak," flattered the old man.

"That is true," nodded Athak. "Put a handle to it, and we will see how heavy it is. Soon shall I return. Have it waiting." And with that he strode off.

Juhor the Snake smiled slyly to himself. Things were going well for him, very well indeed. So, carefully and skil-

fully and patiently too, he tugged and strained at the wet rawhide lashings which, drying, would shrink and bind helve and head till both were as rigid as if but one piece.

Some two hours later the shadow of Athak fell again athwart old Juhor's gnarled and twisted body. The old weapon-maker looked up in feigned surprize.

"The ax," Athak demanded, shortly.

Juhor indicated it where it leaned against his door-post. Athak closed his huge fist about the thick, tough oaken handle. A smile of ferocious pleasure came over his usually stolid features the instant he lifted the weapon, while into his eyes came a covetous light such as nothing in all his life had ever aroused before.

"Truly, a weapon worthy of even me," he rumbled. "Its price, O Juhor?"

"Canst thou pay it, O Athak?"

"Whatever be the price, I will pay it. That ax shall be mine!"

"Thine after it be paid for," nodded the cripple. "Neither thou, O Athak, nor any other in this tribe shall own that war-ax till it be paid for."

"No?" Athak sneered. "Look now, Juhor the Snake. In my grasp is thy handiwork. Since the price be so great, what shall hinder me, Athak the Terrible, from testing it on that old skull of thine? So shalt thou lose ax, price, and life all together!"

Juhor gazed calmly up at him.

"What shall hinder, O Athak the Fool? Only this! With every stroke, as I worked I breathed a charm, a curse, on the head of him who should possess that ax unearned. Strike if thou wilt. Juhor is old and crippled, and can not prevent thee!"

Athak hurriedly stood the ax against the wall and squatted down by Juhor.

"Nay," he rumbled, "I did but jest, old man! Name me the price I must pay for that wonder-ax. It will go hard with me if I earn it not."

"It is a long tale, Athak the Chief," said Juhor. "I must tell it in mine own way. Hast time and patience to listen?"

"Aye," grunted Athak. "Time enow, patience too, so be it ends in my ownership of that ax."

"Harken, then!" Juhor settled himself more comfortably, relaxing perceptibly indeed, for up till that moment he had not been sure if Athak would prove to be the man he, Juhor, had hoped for; or if it would be necessary to tempt some other mighty warrior with the bait of that great jade-headed war-ax. For a long moment the gnarled old cripple sat silent; then:

"As a little boy, O Athak, dost recall that in those days Juhor was tall and straight and a warrior even as thou art now?"

"War-chief thyself, for a while," Athak nodded, "if I recall aright."

"True, O Athak! And now—Juhor the Snake, as thou seest! Broken, twisted, old and ugly. Maker of weapons and—dealer in magic, among other things. But in those days whereof I now speak, I was young, strong and restive. In war, Juhor was the foremost; in peace, unable to sit day by day while the women worked. Nay, I hunted big animals, and was a crafty hunter, too. Also I traveled much, visited other tribes, and strange sights did I see.

"ONE soft summer I journeyed far to the northward. Into a country of hills came I finally. Snow-crowned were those hills, robed in forests of pine and spruce and hemlock; and the lakes of water, which were many, were very beautiful to behold. So pure were the waters that they seemed black to one looking down into them from a height. Oh, a very fair country, Athak, but inhabited

by a race of devils in the semblance of men.

"For as I slept one night on the banks of a small lake, all unaware that foes were nigh, the light of my fire was observed by watchful eyes. And I awoke at the dawning with two strong warriors atop of me! Of course I struggled, but to what avail? Two had leapt on me, but a dozen more stood ready to aid them, were there need. So they bound Juhor, and bore him, trussed like a wild beast, to their tribal village.

"A hundred houses of stone were in that village. A high stone wall enclosed them safely. Only one gateway pierced that wall, and it was so narrow that two men with spears might easily hold it against a strong war-party.

"Into the largest building they bore me and threw me into a stone-floored room. Afterward I learned that the building was their temple, where, with horrible rites, they worshipped their devil-god.

"For a day and a night I lay there, bound hand and foot; hungry, too, although I was filled full with rage; but to tell truth, fearsome also, for I knew not what fate lay before me; albeit I could guess, to some extent; and my guesses were not of enjoyable matters—to me, at least.

"When on the second morning there entered one bearing food and drink, I believed for a moment that I was dreaming, or had gone mad and was seeing that which was not.

"But then *she* spoke. . . .

"And to my enchanted ears the sound of her voice was as the song of birds in the golden springtime of the world. The sight of her was like to the glory of the sun in the first bright hour of the day. Tall she was—not squatty as are our women—full-breasted, strong, yet shapely in body and limbs. Blue were her eyes—blue as were the waters of the mountain lake where I was captured. Pink were her cheeks as are the blooms of the wild roses. Scarlet were her lips, even as the blood from a fresh-dealt wound; no snow ashine in the light of the full moon ever gleamed so brightly as did her strong white teeth; and her head was crowned with a great mass of hair red as the flames from a burning pitch-pine log—hair that fell almost to her feet.

"Forgotten were food, drink, hunger, captivity, apprehension; and I knew but one desire. . . .

"Her I wanted, and her I would have; aye, though afterward I died ten deaths of torture before I were finally slain.

"With one powerful surge I burst the rawhide bonds against which I'd struggled in vain all through a day and a night! And she did not flinch, nor did she manifest aught of fear as I rose to my feet. Her blue eyes lit with a flame matching my own fire! Her scarlet lips smiled approval and she laid one finger, cautioningly, on her lip, in token of silence. Setting down the vessels of food and drink, she came, unfalteringly, straight into my opened arms.

" 'O Man of Might,' she whispered—for their language is very like to ours, and I could understand her fairly well—'you have taken my heart in your keeping. Yet how shall it profit us? I am the Red Witch of Ugdarr, the 'God-Who-Eats-Human-Hearts!' I am sworn, virgin, to his service; and you, O Strong One, are destined to provide his next meal!'

"For a bit I stood afraid. To die in battle was one thing, but to die helpless, a sacrifice to some devil-god named 'Ugdarr', who ate human hearts. . . . Then I caught fast hold on my waning courage.

" 'When and how do I?'

" 'Three moons hence,' she said sadly. 'Four times in the year—and the last time was but a few days before you came. You will be fettered by one ankle atop of the great stone altar at the feet of the image of Ugdarr. You will be given any weapon you may select—ax, club, spear or knife. Three young warriors, desirous of proving themselves before the assembled tribe, will attack you, one at a time, armed with a similar weapon to your choice, but their ankles will not be bound! If you wound one so that he falls to the ground, his heart will be torn at once from his breast and given to the village dogs as something unfit for Ugdarr. But even should you slay all three, still are you doomed. You have but one advantage. They may wound you till you can not stand longer, but slay you outright they dare not. To be acceptable to Ugdarr, your heart must come from your yet living breast while you still breathe, however feebly. And—the tribe will eat your flesh!'

" 'No hope of escape,' I whispered through dry lips.

" 'None,' she replied drearily.

"In my heart I swore that if I might not escape Ugdarr's hungry maw, at least I would make a mock of him. . . . And I did, Athak!

"Each day thereafter she came bringing food and drink, for part of her service to Ugdarr lay in feeding Ugdarr's victim. And the devil-god wanted his sacrifice well nourished, that his heart might be more of a dainty morsel.

"Not long dared she tarry at any one time during the daylight hours, but again and again in the dead of night, when none suspected, she crept to my side and we lay in each other's arms till the first gray hint of dawn . . . and I knew, finally, that I had made a mockery of the devil-god Ugdarr. . . .

"YOUNG was I in those days, Athak! I had no thought for the woman, whether or not her tribe would mete out vengeance upon her for daring to give herself to me—me, the captive destined for Ugdarr's gullet; her, the virgin priestess who had violated her office; but later I was to think—oh, many, many times!

"For one night we were discovered, despite all her imagined caution. An old, old man, servant also of the devil-god, whose office it was to cut out the hearts of the sacrifices, became suspicious. Nay, he came not alone, but with a dozen ugly-faced warriors at his back. . . .

"Surprized as we were, in store for me was another surprize when, before all the tribe at the following noon, that old man pronounced our dooms.

" 'The man-captive is no more fit for Ugdarr's sacrifice,' he said sternly. 'He shall be tortured thus—he shall be tied to a post and each member of the tribe, from the youngest child to the oldest man or woman, shall throw at him one stone each. If still he lives, maimed as he will be, let him be borne to that place where first he was found and there left with the curse of Ugdarr upon him. Should he die, there's an end. If he lives, then he is free to go whither he will, save to return to this village. But should he crawl back here, then he shall be burned, slowly, to ashes.

" 'For the woman who was a maid—this! Witch of Ugdarr she was, and Witch of Ugdarr she shall remain till the child reach adolescence. Then shall she rear it to serve the god. If a boy, he shall become a priest. If a girl, she shall take her mother's place as Witch; and then this evil-doer who preferred the caresses of a captive to the favor of the great Ugdarr shall be bound at Ugdarr's feet and there she shall be stoned to death by the tribe—and the village dogs shall devour her body. I have spoken.'

"So, O Athak, you behold Juhor the Broken One! 'Snake' they name me, partly because I have wisdom and magic of a sort. But at first they so called me because I *crawled* one day into this my native village—how I made that long, terrible journey, broken, shattered, maimed, warped and twisted as I am, I know not. It was all a horrible torment like a dreadful dream of the night. Yet I did it, my brain aflame with but one idea—vengeance!

"Now, O Athak, Great War-Chief, thou knowest the price of the ax—the beautiful green-stone war-ax! Not with that ugly wooden handle, either, but with this——" and Juhor held up a long, finely carved handle of pure ivory! Athak's eyes fairly blazed at the sight. He could hardly speak.

"Ax and handle, *mine,* if——"

"If thou wilt make war upon the tribe of Ugdarr, slaying man, woman and child, save only the Red Witch and her—my—*our*—child: bringing her and the child, if both still live, here to me. . . ."

Athak nodded briefly.

"I am War-Chief," he said quietly. "The warriors and the young men will follow where I lead. I take the ax with me. Wielding that, not even this 'Eater-of-hearts' Ugdarr himself shall withstand the war-frenzy of Athak the Strong!"

"I said," old Juhor pointed out, "that the ax must be earned ere it be possessed. Otherwise a curse——"

"Athak has never lied yet! He does not begin now, even to gain that wonder-ax! It will be earned! Thy price will be paid as soon as I can rouse the warriors and reach that devil-god's village. But I use that ax in the fighting, or I stir not a single step on thine errand!"

For a long while Juhor stared at Athak. Then he nodded as if fully satisfied at what he read in the eyes of the great war-chief.

"The ivory handle from a mammoth's tusk shall be fitted ere morning," he promised. "In Athak's grasp shall the magic war-ax earn its own purchase price. Juhor has said it!"

The exultant yell pealing from Athak's throat startled the entire village.

And Ran Kron, the untried stripling who aspired to the status of a warrior; sitting anigh and hanging breathless upon every word falling from the lips of Juhor the Snake, saw his opportunity and promptly grasped at it.

"Ho, Athak the Great Chief," he cried boldly. "Here is one for thy war-party!"

Athak stared contemptuously at the slight figure.

"Girl with the semblance of a boy," he jeered. "Thy mother made a mistake. . . ."

And a lightning-swift lunge with a slender white flint knife in the hands of the infuriated youth well-nigh despoiled old Juhor of his long-plotted vengeance, then and there.

"Thou fool ten times accursed," shrilled the old weapon-maker. But Athak laughed, a hearty, roaring bellow wherein was no trace of anger.

"Nay," he told Juhor. "Let be! None are born full-grown and proven! The boy has the heart of a warrior. Even thus would I have replied to a like insult. He marches with the *other* fighting-men!"

THE next night the old men sat in a circle, thumping on the snakeskin-headed war-drums, and the old women in a still larger outer circle banged and clattered cymbals of flat bone plates from the shoulder-blades of the larger animals.

The old men chanted and the old women shrilled at intervals, while every male of fighting size and age danced and leapt and pranced and shouted boastfully, waving and brandishing their weapons. Finally, as the fire in the center

of the circles died down, each man tossed his weapon on to a pile in the dancing-space in token that even as the weapons were all together, so would each man be at one with all the others of the war-party. Athak, as leader, tossed his newly acquired jade-headed war-ax atop of all the rest, so that when the weapons were lifted, his would be first, even as he was first in command. As his wonder-weapon—the tale of which had already been bruited about the village—fell atop of the rest, the warriors broke into their deep-voiced battle-cry:

"A-Houk! A-Houk! A-Houk!"

Athak was a good leader. Never once did the war-party see any one, nor were they seen by any wandering hunter from the morning they left their native village until they sighted the walls of Ugdarr's people. It called for craft and strategy to achieve this, but Athak's brain was equal to the task.

The first intimation in the gray dawning that the people of Ugdarr had of enemy proximity was the deep-toned:

"A-Houk! A-Houk! A-Houk!"

Into the undefended gate surged the men of Athak's band—for two skilled spear-throwers, at Athak's command, had crawled close an hour previously, while yet it was dark, and had made sure that the two men guarding the gateway slept the last long sleep.

Counter-yells arose of:

"Hah-Yah! Yah-Yah!"

And out from their huts like a swarm of angry hornets poured the men of Ugdarr. After all, it was not an all-day battle. At most, there were some hundred or a hundred and fifty savages locked together in one wild whirl of clubs, knives, spears and axes—a struggle in which quarter was neither asked nor proffered.

One savage fight is very much the same as another, the only thing which distinguished that one being that for the first time in his life Athak the Strong One was laid prostrate on his back. A fallen enemy had stabbed him in the calf of his leg at the same moment that another man of Ugdarr had hit him on the head with a club.

Ran Kron, fighting madly at the left side of his gigantic chief, promptly repaid the clubman by practically eviscerating him with the sixteen-inch stone knife which formed the young warrior's sole weapon, and then bestriding Athak's body, swinging in both hands the club he'd wrested from his victim as he fell. It was but a moment in which Athak lay dazed; then he was on his feet again, bellowing "A-Houk" as lustily as ever, and smiting even more furiously with the great jade ax. But he found breath between blows to shout to Ran Kron:

"No longer art thou an untried youth, but a warrior! Shalt be made Athak's blood-brother when this fighting ends!"

If the stripling had fought madly before, after that promise of Athak's he became like a youthful demon unleashed. And, in consequence, he was bleeding from a dozen minor wounds by the time the affray ended.

And its ending was complete. The huge war-chief had made a definite pledge to Juhor, and as he himself had declared, it was no habit of his to deal in lies. Wounded or whole, those of Ugdarr's people who survived the fighting were dragged before their own devil-god and knocked on the heads; all save a few strong-bodied women who were kept to act as beasts of burden and carry loot for their captors on their homeward journey; and even those would be slain as soon as the trip was ended.

From these women, questioned by Athak, it was learned that Juhor's Red Witch of Ugdarr had been slain a few

years previously. But she had left a daughter, Red Dawn. . . .

"Where——"

Nobody knew. . . .

Athak picked up one woman and flung her, bodily, into a fire blazing near at hand. By the time the shrieking wretch crawled out, the other women recalled that in the Temple of Ugdarr there were a number of hidden rooms. . . .

It was Ran Kron who found her. What magical words he used, none knew, but she listened to him without fear, and came forth from the building hand in hand with the youth. Nor did she relinquish her hold when he brought her before Athak.

"Which is the captive?" shouted the chief, in high good humor. Made bold by Athak's friendliness, Ran Kron grinned and replied:

"I am, O Athak!"

The chief stared a second, then grinned back.

"Had I the right, I'd say 'Take her, lad!' But she goes to old Juhor. It is for him to say what disposal shall be made of her."

JUHOR the Snake heard the welcoming tumult heralding the returned war-party, and smiled his wry smile. When the gigantic form of Athak stood before him, the old weapon-maker looked up calmly, although deep within himself he was in a storm of emotion. Athak's right hand grasped the great war-ax, while his left he held fast-clamped on the shoulder of a slim, beautiful girl whose hair was a flaming red-golden glory.

"Ax and purchase-price, O Juhor the Snake. Athak keeps his word!"

"The ax is paid for, and is all thine, O Athak the Mighty! Upon the ax is no curse. Nay, so long as thou shalt hold it in battle, none may overcome thee. Dost want the maid, too, O Athak? None better could I give her to. As my son—with thy might, and my wisdom——"

"Not I, Juhor! The ax fills my one desire. Rather, I would that thou give her to my blood-brother, Ran Kron. He wants her, and I think he has her favor."

"Give *her*—to—that—*cub!* Athak, dost jest?"

"Cub?" roared the chief. "My blood-brother, I said! None braver than he ever went forth to war from this village. Swift of foot, great of heart, fearless, and a deadly killer with that long knife of his, I myself saw him account for five in the fighting at Ugdarr's village. Saved my life, too, *mine,* Athak the Chief! Young he is yet, it is true. Had he greater war-wisdom, and more years, I'd make him second in command under me. And *you* call him—cub!"

"Girl," said Juhor, hastily veering away from the subject which had aroused Athak's wrath, "thou art my daughter. Hath thy mother——"

"I heard him"—she indicated Athak—"name thee Juhor the Snake. My mother, before they stoned her to death in Ugdarr's village, told me a tale of a captive, Juhor the Strong One, who was stoned by the tribe because of her, who was borne into the wilderness, and there left to live or die even as Ugdarr chose. Art thou in truth that same Juhor?"

The old cripple could only nod, for words failed him. The girl looked too, too like another and elder Red Dawn. . . . The girl flung herself impulsively on her knees beside him, drew his old head to her young breast, smoothing his sparse white locks with her slim soft hands, crooning over him. . . . The warriors turned away at a grunt from Athak.

"This is no time to forward thy suit, my brother," the chief told the young Ran Kron. And the youth nodded, understandingly. He could wait.

RED DAWN was the most beautiful woman the tribe had ever beheld, and many were the young men who sought her from old Juhor. But to one and all he gave the same reply:

"Her heart and her desire are all for Ran Kron. She is my daughter and shall please herself."

So in due time the day came when before the whole people Juhor tied Red Dawn and Ran Kron together with a strong cord, calling down curses many and horrible upon the head of whoso should attempt to sever that bond. And the tribe, with feasting, and mirth, and jest, celebrated the wedding. Yet some there were who reasoned that as the girl was the most lovely, and Athak was the most mighty, she should have been mated with the great chief rather than with the youthful warrior.

But when some, made bold by drunkenness, ventured to hint thus to Athak, he roared with laughter. Then, for he had imbibed largely of strong drink himself, he became inspired with a most wondrous idea.

"Juhor," he shouted, "in thy hands lies the power to bind the cord of wedlock, where thine own offspring are concerned. Thou hast wed Ran Kron to Red Dawn. Now, haste thee and wed me to thine other child!"

"My—other—child," Juhor stared in wonderment. "Nay, O Athak! I have no child other than Red Dawn."

Athak held up his jade war-ax.

"This," he shouted, so that all heard. "The child that thou didst create. Wed me to her, for I love her more than I ever could love my woman of flesh and blood."

The grim fancy caught the imaginations of the people, and they clamored for the ceremony. Juhor, knowing Athak's disposition, and seeing that he was at that pitch of drunkenness wherein good humor abruptly changes to fury when crossed, took a fresh cord and performed the rite with all the needful words and curses.

Again Athak tossed the weapon high in air above his head.

"Athak's wife!" he bellowed. *"A-Houk! A-Houk! A-Houk!"*

Catching fire from his fire, the warriors responded in savage chorus: *"A-Houk! A-Houk! A-Houk!"*

Yet one old hag there was—own sister to Athak's mother who had died giving a man-child to the world—who dwelt in Athak's hut and cooked his food for him, who sat and glowered while all others made merry. She was getting old and lazy, and had long urged the giant chief to bring a younger woman into the hut as his wife. All through the feasting, the old woman said naught about what was in her mind, but next morning, well knowing that Athak's head was aching fit to burst, she queried with her tongue laden with venom:

"Was your stone bride kind to you in the night, O Athak, and were her caresses sweet?" Then, with a cackle of derision, as he glared at her: "She can never give you a son to boast that Athak the Mighty was his father. She can not cook for you. She can deal wounds, but she can not heal wounds with the poultices of soothing leaves . . . better had you taken Juhor's *other* daughter——" And with that, dodging a chunk of wood hurled at her by the exasperated chief, she fled the hut, still cackling evilly.

And thenceforward she lost no chance to prod Athak about his folly in "choosing the wrong daughter of Juhor" until in time her evil hints and slurs bore fruit. She was helped in her work by the fact that since Ran Kron had had one taste of war, he'd found it so greatly to his liking that twice afterward he'd gone out with small parties of young and ambitious

men; and in both cases had easily proved himself the foremost. And the hag hinted to Athak that his prestige as chief was seriously threatened by this young upstart —as she termed the youth.

Came a day when Athak harkened and took her gibing seriously; so that thereafter he began casting meaning glances at Red Dawn whenever they met. Worse still occurred when, in one of his drunken spells, he sought to drag her into his hut against her will.

His girl-wife's shrieks reached Ran Kron's ears where he sat in converse with a group of other young warriors. With a cat-like rush he hurled himself at the would-be ravisher. Twice and thrice his long flint knife stabbed, lightning-quick, drawing blood and eliciting a yell of pain each time he struck.

Completely lost to all thoughts of blood-brotherhood, and driven by a two-fold lust—to have Ran Kron's wife and Ran Kron's life, Athak let go his hold on the shrieking, struggling Red Dawn and drew his great jade ax from his belt. Ran Kron, seeing, leaped back, snatching a spear from the hand of a bystander, and promptly lunged with it at the face of the giant chief.

For a while it was either man's fight. Mighty as Athak was, enraged, too, so that flecks of foam dripped from his lips, still Ran Kron kept him busy; dodging, leaping, parrying, or evading the sweep of the great green-flashing ax; from time to time getting in a thrust with his spear that drew blood each time, but never deep enough to reach a vital spot and end matters.

Yet despite all his efforts, step by step the lighter man was forced to retreat—suddenly a yell arose from the onlookers, partly in triumph, partly in warning, according to their sympathies. With a feeling that the end was nigh, Ran Kron realized that he'd reached the brink of the river, and that back of him lay a fifty-foot drop to the swift, swollen, muddy waters below. In sheer desperation he hurled his spear straight at the face of his giant opponent.

Athak saw it coming, too swift for him to dodge it. He threw up both arms in front of his face. The stone spearhead drove deep into his right forearm, and a spurt of blood followed, staining the ivory helve of his battle-ax a bright crimson.

In despair, Ran Kron whipped out his long stone knife, prepared to sell his life as dearly as possible. Athak bellowed his rage, and moved a step closer. The great ax swung up above his tousled head and swept down again on its death-dealing arc. Ran Kron, summoning up his fast-waning strength, dodged again, bending his torso far back. Athak's hands were too blood-smeared from the wound in his forearm. The ivory ax-handle slipped in his grasp. Flying through the air, it struck Ran Kron a glancing blow on the side of his head, stunning him. The young warrior, his balance overborne, went backward over the edge of the low bluff; and, with a sullen double splash, Ran Kron and the great jade ax that had overthrown him to his death disappeared together beneath the surface of the swollen stream. . . .

Now, how I, Randall Crone, know this latter part which ensued after Ran Kron fell into the river, I can not tell; for I do not understand. But know it I do, however.

Athak sank to the ground, gasping from his last terrific exertion. Red Dawn would have thrown herself into the river, there to join her man, Ran Kron, but was seized and held by certain ones who sought to curry favor with Athak.

Juhor the Snake hobbled up, stood in front of Athak, and shook his gnarled old

fist in the giant's face. The old man was fairly a-quiver with the rage consuming him. Twice he opened his mouth and twice he closed it again before he could find words to express himself.

"Was it for this, thou fool, that I made for thee that magic ax? Did I not wed thee to the ax at thine express command, by thine own choice? Did I not lay curses many and deep upon the head of whoso should part ye twain who were one in wedlock? And now, it is thine own hands which have flung the magic ax into the deep, deep river!

"Now I, Juhor the Snake, prophesy to thee, O Athak the Fool! Thou shalt go accursed for all thy remaining days upon the earth. Evil shall befall thee ever, and when thou shalt die, in outer darkness shalt thou wander till once again the magic ax which thou thyself didst name 'Athak's Wife' shall return to thine embrace! Athak the Accursed, I, Juhor, have spoken thy doom!"

Athak staggered to his feet and clutched one great hand upon the old man's shoulder.

"Aye," he snarled, "thou hast spoken —thine own doom, Juhor the Snake!" One shove he gave the old cripple, and Juhor, with a single quavering cry, vanished over the edge of the all-devouring river. . . .

ONE might say that I'd been dreaming; or that I'd been in a trance state and had left my body and gone into the astral plane—but neither hypothesis would account fully for the facts.

For I learned, upon my return to my Twentieth Century personality, that I'd been gone for a considerable time, *body and all!* My room had been found vacant and my bed unslept in, the morning after I'd been visited by the phantom of Athak.

Then as totally unproclaimed as my absence had been, I reappeared. And I had considerable difficulty in explaining matters to those most interested in my movements—business associates, and others. Of course I hastened to Rhoda as quickly as possible, and from her lips I had full confirmation of my strange experience. For she, too, had "vanished" insofar as her everyday environment was concerned, and she, too, had just reappeared. I did not have to make any explanations to her. She knew! She'd been through the same sort of adventures as had I. In other words, she had suddenly awakened from a sound sleep to find herself Red Dawn, the young Witch of Ugdarr! In fact, she was able to tell me the part I did not know, and describe the episode after Athak threw old Juhor over the bluff. Yet what she told was but little after all.

Athak had dragged her to his hut, where she naturally anticipated just about the worst fate that could happen. In a frenzy of fear, she had tried to stab herself, but Athak prevented that by hitting her with his fist the instant she caught up a knife.

But he had struck too hard, and thereby cheated himself of the woman he coveted so greatly that he'd slain his own chosen blood-brother in order to get her for himself. She recalled the terrific concussion of his fist against the side of her face. Ensued a brief period of unconsciousness, naturally, and when her consciousness returned, she was again Rhoda Day, in her own room, and her mother was bending over her, demanding a trifle crossly:

"Rhoda, where in the world have you been for the last few days, and why did you go away without saying anything about it to me, before you started?"

As to what happened to Athak, we

neither of us knew; but could easily imagine, knowing him as well and unfavorably as we did. To use Rhoda's words:

"He probably went from bad to worse, just as Juhor predicted, until some one did the world a service by ridding it of his presence; and he has since, to use Juhor's very words, 'dwelt in outer darkness'. But in some manner he—or his spirit, rather—located my whereabouts, and he seems determined to assert his imagined ownership. Probably he doesn't even know that he is dead and hasn't a body in which to function any more."

Wherein she was wrong. Later again, we learned that Athak knew quite well that he was devoid of a body. All he was waiting for was a good chance to acquire one, in order to resume his age-old devilment just where he'd been compelled to leave off by reason of hitting Red Dawn too hard and thus cheating himself of her possession.

Apparently old Juhor's curse had taken effect, and Athak had, in truth, dwelt in outer darkness instead of coming back to earth via a rebirth, as we two had done. But the more we speculated, the more intricate and involved the problems became; so that finally we quit all speculating and preserved a policy of watchful waiting instead.

Meantime, at my urgency, Rhoda capitulated and we were married. For a brief while we managed to fool the savage phantom. Travelling on our honeymoon trip, we kept to the crowded cities, knowing that for us to isolate ourselves would best please the vindictive ghost who so hated us. In modern hotels and amongst throngs of people, he'd be out of his element.

But honeymoons end eventually, in this workaday world, and dollar-chasing is a very necessary pursuit if one would continue to enjoy life in its modern phase. So, regretfully, we returned home, not, of course, to Rhoda's parents, but to a little place of our own.

And Athak turned up the first night we were there!

His fury, when he grasped the situation, was something to tremble at. His futile attempts to wreak either or both of us bodily injury, had they not been so frightful, would have been ludicrous. For over half the night he carried on his antics. It was of no avail to turn off the light, so I left it burning. Rhoda was so unstrung that I feared a permanent shock to her nervous system would result.

I was angry, not with the ordinary type of wrath common to every one at times, but that same savage ugliness I'd experienced once before. Much more of it, and I'd again become Ran Kron, the young savage warrior. . . . But Rhoda sensed the change taking place in me, and begged so earnestly that I control myself, that somehow, to please her, I succeeded in fighting back my rage. At that, I could not have done it, had she not whispered:

"Randall, my husband, for my sake be very careful! Can not you see that you are rapidly getting into a state such as will best please him, and render us accessible by translating us again to his plane, where he *can* function?"

It was a hard task, even then, but I did it. Then I had what I considered a happy thought, and carried it out; and it did win for us a modicum of rest from Athak's rage, if only for a short time. Deliberately I kissed Rhoda, then grinned triumphantly at the frenzied savage ghost; and for a second, I thought that Athak the Terrible would disintegrate from the hell-storm of wrath and jealous hate that simple act aroused on his part. But then he turned sulky, withdrew until he seemed to merge with the wall itself, and there remained, glowering. And finally we

fell asleep and left him to sulk all he would.

But the next night he was back again, twice as ugly as before. And for many a night after that.

Then I thought up another bright idea, or deemed it one until——

IT WAS summer, and the nights were warm, so we took to sleeping in a rose arbor in the garden. For the first night there was absolutely no sign of Athak. But on the second night, Rhoda wakened me from a sound slumber with the startled exclamation:

"Randall, what *is* that repulsive odor?"

One sniff told me instantly that it was the acrid, decayed-cucumber scent of a copperhead snake! Very cautiously, holding my breath in stark fear, I pressed the switch of a flashlight and swept the near-by ground with its bright rays. Luckily I managed to reach a stick with which I broke the reptile's back before it could —*ugh!* I shuddered at thought of what might have happened. And, somehow, in my mind, I associated that snake's arrival into our garden of peace with Athak's hatred. And instantly, although I heard no sound, I was aware of a burst of unholy glee that fully confirmed my conviction.

Next day I bought an automatic pistol equipped with a silencer, and a box of cartridges. Then I did that which would cause any alienist to suspect my mental condition; for I had every bullet extracted from the loaded shells and replaced by silver ones. I'd read somewhere that silver bullets are efficacious against such as Athak; and I was open to conviction. But when I laid in that equipment I unwittingly played into Athak's hands, completely.

Nightly thereafter I kept the loaded pistol within reach, and for several nights we were undisturbed. Yet always we had an uncomfortable sense of Athak's presence, albeit he kept himself invisible. Actually, I began to think that in some manner he'd sensed that I was organized for him with a potent weapon, and that he was correspondingly cautious about bringing matters to a definite showdown; which proves how little I know about the unseen world and still less about the abilities of those who dwell therein.

We had gotten so that we could fall asleep almost immediately after retiring in our rose arbor. It was around midnight one night that I awoke with the certitude that we had been outwitted and that even then we were exposed to some unutterably ghastly horror. Instinctively I grasped the pistol and threw off the safety catch. Rhoda had awakened at the same time, and we sat up simultaneously. She screamed, once, and I felt the cold sweat of fear break out all over me.

Not ten yards away was the phantom form of Athak. A leer of cruel, anticipatory triumph was on his ugly face, and he had reason for it, too; for although he himself was but a phantom, there was nothing intangible about the monstrous dog he had somehow introduced into our garden. It was just a dog; yes; but such a dog! It loomed as big as a calf! I learned, later, that the brute was a Tibetan mastiff belonging to a dog-fancier dwelling some twenty miles distant. And that breed of dog is one of the most ferocious of the entire canine species.

Its eyes were aflame with fury, and as they were fixed unwaveringly upon me, it was not difficult to imagine what was coming next. Its jaws dripped slaver, and its lips were drawn back in a soundless snarl. Its whole body was a-quiver with pent-up energy.

And even as I noted all this in one horrified glance, the phantom chief waved an arm in a gesture of command, and the huge beast launched itself straight at me!

One bound brought it half-way, but then I brought the pistol into action. I'd had a gunsmith do a little juggling with the inner works of that automatic; so that in a way, it was more a miniature machine-gun than a pistol. Once the trigger was pulled, provided it was held back, the shots were continuous till the magazine was empty. I intended, when I had it fixed like that, to put sufficient of those silver bullets into, or through, Athak, to make a thorough job of it, or him. But as things turned out, it was the dog that got the entire load; and it needed them all, too, squarely in its big skull, to stop its ferocious rush.

Even at that, the brute didn't die instantly, but fell on the ground almost at the entrance to the arbor, writhing and twitching in a fast-spreading pool of blood.

Athak's opportunity had arrived! That infernal savage had waited for just such a chance for ages! The blood furnished him with the medium for materialization, and he promptly utilized it. Before I could reload the pistol by inserting a fresh-charged magazine clip into the butt, the metamorphosis was achieved. It was, to all intents and purposes, a flesh and blood savage from out the distant Ice Age who hurled his huge bulk at us, whirling a heavy bludgeon in one knotted fist!

RHODA gasped, moaned feebly, and slumped to the floor of the rose arbor in a limp heap. And I, feeling that this was the end for us, and the consummation of Athak's triumph, nevertheless flung myself off the bed in one wild leap, to meet him and have it over with.

I had naught save that empty pistol still in my hand wherewith to put up a battle, and that was but a poor and futile thing beside the club Athak flourished. Yet in some manner I dodged his first stroke, retaliating by throwing my empty pistol into his face as hard as I could slam it. Luckily for me, it landed just where eyebrows and nose meet. For a second it dazed him, and he paused, even in his frenzy, to shake his head to clear his sight, I suppose. And, in that one second of reprieve, a miracle and naught else came to my aid, or I should not be here now to tell this tale. . . .

Out of nowhere, apparently, appeared the gnarled, twisted, crippled form of old Juhor the Snake! Into my hands he thrust the ivory handle of a green-stone war-ax!

"Heh-heh-heh!" laughed the incredible apparition. "Once he stole your wife! It is only fitting that now you should have his!"

What strange power lay in that ancient war-ax? I know not, even now. But this I do know: No sooner had my hands closed in a firm grip on the handle than a terrific surge of commingled hate and strength suffused my entire body! I felt that my muscles had doubled—nay! infinitely multiplied in power to smite. I heaved the heavy ax aloft and moved toward my enemy. He saw the weapon, and hell flamed in his face and eyes. In a low, dreadful tone he spoke:

"Now! Long have I waited for this day! Red Dawn, and the green ax! Once again are both within my reach! O Fool, who thinks to stand against Athak the Mighty with his own war-ax; now shall I slay thee, and take both weapon and woman! Then shall she and I together eat your heart, raw, torn from out your yet warm body. . . ."

He had no time for further boasting. With all the new strength that had flowed into me, I struck out at him. Skilled warrior that he was, he parried the ax-sweep with his club. Very craftily he struck just back of the stone head, turning the stroke aside thereby. The shock of his blow jarred my arms clear to my shoulder-sock-

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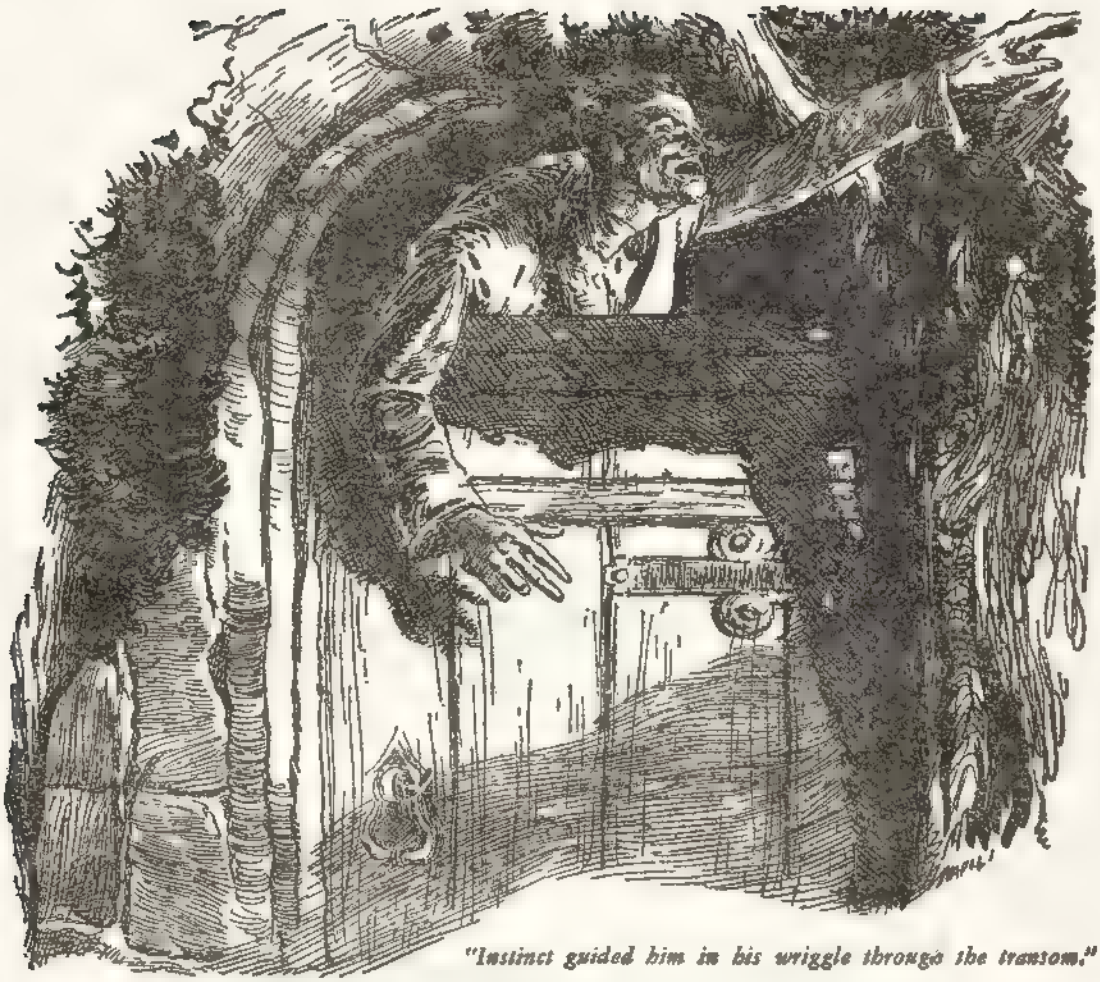

"Instinct guided him in his wriggle through the transom."

In the Vault

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

A shuddery graveyard tale by the author of "The Rats in the Walls"

THERE is nothing more absurd, as I view it, than that conventional association of the homely and the wholesome which seems to pervade the psychology of the multitude. Mention a bucolic Yankee setting, a bungling and thick-fibered village undertaker, and a careless mishap in a tomb, and no average reader can be brought to expect more than a hearty albeit grotesque phase of comedy. God knows, though, that the prosy tale which George Birch's death permits me to tell has in it aspects beside which some of our darkest tragedies are light.

Birch acquired a limitation and changed his business in 1881, yet never discussed

the case when he could avoid it. Neither did his old physician, Doctor Davis, who died years ago. It was generally stated that the affliction and shock were results of an unlucky slip whereby Birch had locked himself for nine hours in the receiving-tomb of Peck Valley Cemetery, escaping only by crude and disastrous mechanical means; but while this much was undoubtedly true, there were other and blacker things which the man used to whisper to me in his drunken delirium toward the last. He confided in me because I was his doctor, and because he probably felt the need of confiding in some one else after Davis died. He was a bachelor, wholly without relatives.

Birch, before 1881, had been the village undertaker of Peck Valley, and was a very calloused and primitive specimen even as such specimens go. The practises I heard attributed to him would be unbelievable today, at least in a city; and even Peck Valley would have shuddered a bit had it known the easy ethics of its mortuary artist in such matters as the ownership of costly "laying-out" apparel invisible beneath the casket's lid, and the degrees of dignity to be maintained in posing and adapting the unseen members of lifeless tenants to containers not always calculated with sublimest accuracy. Most distinctly Birch was lax, insensitive, and professionally undesirable; yet I still think he was not an evil man. He was merely crass of fiber and function—thoughtless, careless, and liquorish, as his easily avoidable accident proves, and without that modicum of imagination which holds the average citizen within certain limits fixed by taste.

Just where to begin Birch's story I can hardly decide, since I am no practised teller of tales. I suppose one should start in the cold December of 1880, when the ground froze and the cemetery delvers found they could dig no more graves till spring. Fortunately the village was small and the death rate low, so that it was possible to give all of Birch's inanimate charges a temporary haven in the single antiquated receiving-tomb. The undertaker grew doubly lethargic in the bitter weather, and seemed to outdo even himself in carelessness. Never did he knock together flimsier and ungainlier caskets, nor disregard more flagrantly the needs of the rusty lock on the tomb door which he slammed open and shut with such nonchalant abandon.

At last the spring thaw came, and graves were laboriously prepared for the nine silent harvests of the grim reaper which waited in the tomb. Birch, though dreading the bother of removal and interment, began his task of transference one disagreeable April morning, but ceased before noon because of a heavy rain that seemed to irritate his horse, after having laid but one body to its permanent rest. That was Darius Peck, the nonagenarian, whose grave was not far from the tomb. Birch decided that he would begin the next day with little old Matthew Fenner, whose grave was also near by; but actually postponed the matter for three days, not getting to work until Good Friday, the fifteenth. Being without superstition, he did not heed the day at all; though ever afterward he refused to do anything of importance on that fateful sixth day of the week. Certainly, the events of that evening greatly changed George Birch.

On the afternoon of Friday, April fifteenth, then, Birch set out for the tomb with horse and wagon to transfer the body of Matthew Fenner. That he was not perfectly sober, he subsequently admitted; though he had not then taken to the wholesale drinking by which he later tried to forget certain things. He was just dizzy and careless enough to annoy his

sensitive horse, which as he drew it viciously up at the tomb neighed and pawed and tossed its head, much as on that former occasion when the rain had seemingly vexed it. The day was clear, but a high wind had sprung up; and Birch was glad to get to shelter, as he unlocked the iron door and entered the side-hill vault. Another might not have relished the damp, odorous chamber with the eight carelessly placed coffins; but Birch in those days was insensitive, and was concerned only in getting the right coffin for the right grave. He had not forgotten the criticism aroused when Hannah Bixby's relatives, wishing to transport her body to the cemetery in the city whither they had moved, found the casket of Judge Capwell beneath her headstone.

The light was dim, but Birch's sight was good, and he did not get Asaph Sawyer's coffin by mistake, although it was very similar. He had, indeed, made that coffin for Matthew Fenner; but had cast it aside at last as too awkward and flimsy, in a fit of curious sentimentality aroused by recalling how kindly and generous the little old man had been to him during his bankruptcy five years before. He gave old Matt the very best his skill could produce, but was thrifty enough to save the rejected specimen, and to use it when Asaph Sawyer died of a malignant fever. Sawyer was not a lovable man, and many stories were told of his almost inhuman vindictiveness and tenacious memory for wrongs real or fancied. To him Birch had felt no compunction in assigning the carelessly made coffin which he now pushed out of the way in his quest for the Fenner casket.

It was just as he had recognized old Matt's coffin that the door slammed to in the wind, leaving him in a dusk even deeper than before. The narrow transom admitted only the feeblest rays, and the overhead ventilation funnel virtually none at all; so that he was reduced to a profane fumbling as he made his halting way among the long boxes toward the latch. In this funereal twilight he rattled the rusty handles, pushed at the iron panels, and wondered why the massive portal had grown so suddenly recalcitrant. In this twilight, too, he began to realize the truth and to shout loudly as if his horse outside could do more than neigh an unsympathetic reply. For the long-neglected latch was obviously broken, leaving the careless undertaker trapped in the vault, a victim of his own oversight.

THE thing must have happened at about three-thirty in the afternoon. Birch, being by temperament phlegmatic and practical, did not shout long; but proceeded to grope about for some tools which he recalled seeing in a corner of the tomb. It is doubtful whether he was touched at all by the horror and exquisite weirdness of his position, but the bald fact of imprisonment so far from the daily paths of men was enough to exasperate him thoroughly. His day's work was sadly interrupted, and unless chance presently brought some rambler hither, he might have to remain all night or longer. The pile of tools soon reached, and a hammer and chisel selected, Birch returned over the coffins to the door. The air had begun to be exceedingly unwholesome, but to this detail he paid no attention as he toiled, half by feeling, at the heavy and corroded metal of the latch. He would have given much for a lantern or bit of candle; but, lacking these, bungled semi-sightlessly as best he might.

When he perceived that the latch was hopelessly unyielding, at least to such meager tools and under such tenebrous conditions as these, Birch glanced about for other possible points of escape. The

vault had been dug from a side-hill, so that the narrow ventilation funnel in the top ran through several feet of earth, making this direction utterly useless to consider. Over the door, however, the high, slit-like transom in the brick façade gave promise of possible enlargement to a diligent worker; hence upon this his eyes long rested as he racked his brains for means to reach it. There was nothing like a ladder in the tomb, and the coffin niches on the sides and rear, which Birch seldom took the trouble to use, afforded no ascent to the space above the door. Only the coffins themselves remained as potential stepping-stones, and as he considered these he speculated on the best mode of arranging them. Three coffin-heights, he reckoned, would permit him to reach the transom; but he could do better with four. The boxes were fairly even, and could be piled up like blocks; so he began to compute how he might most stably use the eight to rear a scalable platform four deep. As he planned, he could not but wish that the units of his contemplated staircase had been more securely made. Whether he had imagination enough to wish they were empty, is strongly to be doubted.

Finally he decided to lay a base of three parallel with the wall, to place upon this two layers of two each, and upon these a single box to serve as the platform. This arrangement could be ascended with a minimum of awkwardness, and would furnish the desired height. Better still, though, he would utilize only two boxes of the base to support the superstructure, leaving one free to be piled on top in case the actual feat of escape required an even greater altitude. And so the prisoner toiled in the twilight, heaving the unresponsive remnants of mortality with little ceremony as his miniature Tower of Babel rose course by course. Several of the coffins began to split under the stress of handling, and he planned to save the stoutly built casket of little Matthew Fenner for the top, in order that his feet might have as certain a surface as possible. In the semi-gloom he trusted mostly to touch to select the right one, and indeed came upon it almost by accident, since it tumbled into his hands as if through some odd volition after he had unwittingly placed it beside another on the third layer.

The tower at length finished, and his aching arms rested by a pause during which he sat on the bottom step of his grim device, Birch cautiously ascended with his tools and stood abreast of the narrow transom. The borders of the space were entirely of brick, and there seemed little doubt but that he could shortly chisel away enough to allow his body to pass. As his hammer blows began to fall, the horse outside whinnied in a tone which may have been encouraging and may have been mocking. In either case, it would have been appropriate, for the unexpected tenacity of the easy-looking brickwork was surely a sardonic commentary on the vanity of mortal hopes, and the source of a task whose performance deserved every possible stimulus.

Dusk fell and found Birch still toiling. He worked largely by feeling now, since newly-gathered clouds hid the moon; and though progress was still slow, he felt heartened at the extent of his encroachments on the top and bottom of the aperture. He could, he was sure, get out by midnight; though it is characteristic of him that this thought was untinged with eery implications. Undisturbed by oppressive reflections on the time, the place, and the company beneath his feet, he philosophically chipped away the stony brickwork, cursing when a fragment hit him in the face, and laughing when one struck the increasingly excited horse that pawed

near the cypress tree. In time the hole grew so large that he ventured to try his body in it now and then, shifting about so that the coffins beneath him rocked and creaked. He would not, he found, have to pile another on his platform to make the proper height, for the hole was on exactly the right level to use as soon as its size would permit.

It must have been midnight at least when Birch decided he could get through the transom. Tired and perspiring despite many rests, he descended to the floor and sat a while on the bottom box to gather strength for the final wriggle and leap to the ground outside. The hungry horse was neighing repeatedly and almost uncannily, and he vaguely wished it would stop. He was curiously unelated over his impending escape, and almost dreaded the exertion, for his form had the indolent stoutness of early middle age.

As he remounted the splitting coffins he felt his weight very poignantly; especially when, upon reaching the topmost one, he heard that aggravated crackle which bespeaks the wholesale rending of wood. He had, it seems, planned in vain when choosing the stoutest coffin for the platform; for no sooner was his full bulk again upon it than the rotting lid gave way, jouncing him two feet down on a surface which even he did not care to imagine. Maddened by the sound, or by the stench which billowed forth even to the open air, the waiting horse gave a scream that was too frantic for a neigh, and plunged madly off through the night, the wagon rattling crazily behind it.

Birch, in his ghastly situation, was now too low for an easy scramble out of the enlarged transom, but gathered his energies for a determined try. Clutching the edges of the aperture, he sought to pull himself up, when he noticed a queer retardation in the form of an apparent drag on both his ankles. In another moment he knew fear for the first time that night; for struggle as he would, he could not shake clear of the unknown grasp which held his feet in relentless captivity. Horrible pains, as of savage wounds, shot through his calves; and in his mind was a vortex of fright mixed with an unquenchable materialism that suggested splinters, loose nails, or some other attribute of a breaking wooden box. Perhaps he screamed. At any rate, he kicked and squirmed frantically and automatically whilst his consciousness was almost eclipsed in a half-swoon.

Instinct guided him in his wriggle through the transom, and in the crawl which followed his jarring thud on the damp ground. He could not walk, it appeared, and the emerging moon must have witnessed a horrible sight as he dragged his bleeding ankles toward the cemetery lodge, his fingers clawing the black mold in brainless haste, and his body responding with that maddening slowness from which one suffers when chased by the phantoms of nightmare. There was evidently, however, no pursuer; for he was alone and alive when Armington, the lodge-keeper, responded to his feeble clawing at the door.

Armington helped Birch to the outside of a spare bed and sent his little son Edwin for Doctor Davis. The afflicted man was fully conscious, but would say nothing of any consequence, merely muttering such things as "Oh, my ankles!", "Let go!", or ". . . . shut in the tomb." Then the doctor came with his medicine-case and asked crisp questions, and removed the patient's outer clothing, shoes and socks. The wounds—for both ankles were frightfully lacerated about the Achilles tendons—seemed to puzzle

the old physician greatly, and finally almost to frighten him. His questioning grew more than medically tense, and his hands shook as he dressed the mangled members, binding them as if he wished to get the wounds out of sight as quickly as possible.

For an impersonal doctor, Davis's ominous and awestruck cross-examination became very strange indeed as he sought to drain from the weakened undertaker every last detail of his horrible experience. He was oddly anxious to know if Birch were sure—absolutely sure—of the identity of that top coffin of the pile, how he had chosen it, how he had been certain of it as the Fenner coffin in the dark, and how he had distinguished it from the inferior duplicate coffin of vicious Asaph Sawyer. Would the firm Fenner casket have caved in so readily? Davis, an old-time village practitioner, had of course seen both at the respective funerals, as indeed he had attended both Fenner and Sawyer in their last illnesses. He had even wondered, at Sawyer's funeral, how the vindictive farmer had managed to lie straight in a box so closely akin to that of the diminutive Fenner.

After a full two hours Doctor Davis left, urging Birch to insist at all times that his wounds were due entirely to loose nails and splintering wood. What else, he added, could ever in any case be proved or believed? But it would be well to say as little as could be said, and to let no other doctor treat the wounds. Birch heeded this advice all the rest of his life until he told me his story, and when I saw the scars—ancient and whitened as they then were—I agreed that he was wise in so doing. He always remained lame, for the great tendons had been severed; but I think the greatest lameness was in his soul. His thinking processes, once so phlegmatic and logical, had become ineffaceably scarred, and it was pitiful to note his reaction to certain chance allusions such as "Friday," "tomb," "coffin," and words of less obvious concatenation. His frightened horse had gone home, but his frightened wits never quite did that. He changed his business, but something always preyed upon him. It may have been just fear, and it may have been fear mixed with a queer belated sort of remorse for bygone crudities. His drinking, of course, only aggravated what he sought to alleviate.

When Doctor Davis left Birch that night, he had taken a lantern and gone to the old receiving-tomb. The moon was shining on the scattered brick fragments and marred façade, and the latch of the great door yielded readily to a touch from the outside. Steeled by old ordeals in dissecting-rooms, the doctor entered and looked about, stifling the nausea of mind and body that everything in sight and smell induced. He cried aloud once, and a little later gave a gasp that was more terrible than a cry. Then he fled back to the lodge and broke all the rules of his calling by rousing and shaking his patient, and hurling at him a succession of shuddering whispers that seared into the bewildered ears like the hissing of vitriol.

"It was Asaph's coffin, Birch, just as I thought! I knew his teeth, with the front ones missing on the upper jaw—never, for God's sake, show those wounds! The body was pretty badly gone, but if ever I saw vindictiveness on any face—or former face! . . . You know what a fiend he was for revenge—how he ruined old Raymond thirty years after their boundary suit, and how he stepped on the puppy that snapped at him a year ago last August. . . . He was the devil

incarnate, Birch, and I believe his eye-for-an-eye fury could beat time and death! God, his rage—I'd hate to have it aimed at me!

"Why did you do it, Birch? He was a scoundrel, and I don't blame you for giving him a cast-aside coffin, but you always did go too damned far! Well enough to skimp on the thing in some way, but you knew what a little man old Fenner was.

"I'll never get the picture out of my head as long as I live. You kicked hard, for Asaph's coffin was on the floor. His head was broken in, and everything was tumbled about. I've seen sights before, but there was one thing too much here. An eye for an eye! Great heavens, Birch, but you got what you deserved! The skull turned my stomach, but the other was worse—*those ankles cut neatly off to fit Matt Fenner's cast-aside coffin!*"

Fog

By CRISTEL HASTINGS

Long ghostly fingers of the dripping mist
Grope silently among the ships that list
To port and starboard along lonely piers
Whose boards know sodden taste of salty tears.

From bow to keel there is the constant sound
Of water—water—water all around—
Of tides that ebb and flow the long night through,
And clinging veils of mist that hide the blue.

A tearful lot is that of ships men tie
'Longside some crumbling wharf where shadows lie
Waiting for measured tread on decks that seem
The pathway of old mariners who dream.

Somewhere in sand lots, looking out to sea
And counting ships in clouds that quickly flee
A gale—ah, ships that wait beside old piers;
You have the wind—the ancient tides of years

And fog that mourns the watered graves of them
While winds all chant a sobbing requiem
In mourning as a grayish phantom hull
Drifts by, her only passenger a gull.

The Earth-Brain

By EDMOND HAMILTON

A thrilling story by a master of science-fiction, about the vast creature on whose body we live

LANDON I had not seen for two years before that day when New York knew fear. That day is remembered yet, with its sudden and unexpected earth-tremor that shook the island shortly after noon, swaying proud towers and shaking windows to fragments and loosing a storm of panic-stricken cries that could not drown the long, grinding roll of the shifting earth beneath.

I was in the midtown section that noon, and had been struggling through the hurrying crowds when the shock and quivering of the ground turned them suddenly into a white-faced, hoarse-voiced and terror-smitten mob. For five minutes they and all New York's millions tasted fear as the streets quivered beneath them. Then the tremor subsided and I saw Landon.

He was standing almost against me in the throng and his face was so strange that for a moment it held me without recognition. For Landon's face was a mask of fear, not the panic that was passing from those about me but a fear beyond fear, a deep and alien dread. His dark eyes looked out of that white and twisted face as though into vistas of hell. And then I recognized him.

"Clark Landon!" I cried. "Why didn't you let me know you were back? I didn't even know you were in the country!"

His dark eyes surveyed me with a fixedness that chilled me. "I landed only two hours ago, Morris," he said. "Two hours ago, and you see what has happened already."

"What's the matter, Landon?" I asked anxiously. "This earth-tremor hasn't upset you? I shouldn't think it would bother you after the polar quake you went through—I read about it at the time."

"Yes, that polar quake," he said softly. "You read that Travis and Skeel were killed in that but I wasn't? I wasn't killed, no; but I've been in all the quakes that have been racking earth since then, in Norway and Russia and Egypt, in Italy and England and now here in New York."

I was amazed. "Why, one would think earthquakes are following you!" I exclaimed. "But they say all these tremors and quakes are due to the big polar cataclysm you went through—they say it touched off things in some way and so caused the quakes that have been going on all over earth ever since that one."

"Ever since that one," Landon repeated slowly. "Yes, they've been going on ever since that one."

He was looking beyond me, lost in a strange abstraction. By then the streets about us were near normal, the city's millions losing their brief panic and taking up again the swift routine that even a near-earthquake could not disturb for long. Hurrying passers-by were already shouldering against the two of us.

"Look here, Landon," I said, "you don't look half well at the moment. My rooms are only a few blocks from here—come up and sit a while and you'll feel better."

"I'm afraid it will take more than that

to make me feel better, Morris," he said.

Yet he came, and when we were seated at a window of my apartment with the mill-race of a crosstown street's traffic below, he seemed to relax a little. Sitting opposite him, I strove to analyze the strange dread that still seemed holding him, but was unable to do more than to say to myself that that dread was real and that Landon had apparently changed completely.

THE Clark Landon I had known had hardly known the meaning of fear, a lithe dark fellow to whom danger spelled delight. His twin and equal interests had been geology and adventure. His inherited money had enabled him to combine the two in expeditions in which he and his inseparable comrades in science and adventure, David Travis and Herbert Skeel, had investigated the world's far corners.

Landon and Travis and Skeel had departed, over two years before, on another such expedition, one intended to take them into the north polar region. Landon had announced their purpose as the investigation of certain, geological oddities believed existent not far from the

"It was in the sheer madness of insane fury that I shot thus into the Earth-Brain."

pole, but all knew that it was the lure of a new adventure that drew him and his companions as much as any hope of adding to geological knowledge.

The three had sailed in a special ice-breaking schooner Landon had chartered, which had taken them as far as the northern shores of Grant Land. From there Landon and Travis and Skeel had started north with two dog-sledges and two Eskimos, believing that with their equipment they could reach their objectives a few hundred miles south of the pole, and return without difficulty.

Ten days after Landon and his party started north from the ship there occurred that terrific earthquake that shook the whole polar region with unprecedented violence, and was registered by the world's seismographs as centering not far south of the pole itself. The waiting schooner was almost destroyed, but escaped the shifting ice and continued to wait, though with scant hope, for the party.

That first awful quake was followed in the next two weeks by a succession of less violent upheavals and tremors, trending southward. Then Landon and one of the Eskimos reappeared. The latter died the next day. Landon himself was far gone but was revived and could tell those on the ship that the great quake had indeed centered where they had been and that Travis and Skeel and the other Eskimo had perished in it. He was brought back to strength during the voyage south, and after a few narrow escapes from glacial fragments the ship reached Halifax.

While Landon was at Halifax had come the sudden quake that destroyed half of that city, though he had escaped. In the succeeding two years Landon himself was forgotten, but the great polar quake he had gone through was often referred to, for earth had been torn ever since by a succession of violent quakes and upheavals. They seemed to progress from one locality to another, from Newfoundland to Norway, to Russia and Egypt and Italy and England. It was the theory of many scientists that these succeeding quakes were caused by a series of faults in earth's structure that had been touched off by the great polar quake Landon had gone through.

Of Landon himself, though, I had heard nothing after his leaving Halifax, and now I was amazed at his changed appearance as he sat opposite me. He must have guessed my thoughts.

"You think I've changed, Morris?" he asked. "Don't deny it, man—I know that I have. I know what's stamped on my face."

"Travis and Skeel——" I began awkwardly.

"Travis and Skeel are dead and they're lucky," he said somberly. "It's not their death that has changed me, though they were the best pals man ever had. It's the way they died.

"There were three of us who went up there," he said, gazing darkly past me. "And the third still lives. I wonder for how long?"

"Landon, you've brooded too much," I told him. "I can understand what an appalling experience that polar quake must have been to go through, but——"

"You can't understand!" he lashed out. "No one can! Morris, you saw me panic-stricken a little while ago when that tremor shook the city. Did it surprize you?"

"Frankly, it did," I said slowly. "But I can understand how that first quake would have unnerved you—and the ones you've chanced to be in since."

"It wasn't chance that I was in them," he said astonishingly, and then leaned to clutch my arm. "Morris, can you conceive of such a thing as earthquakes following one person across the face of this

earth, seeking him out no matter where he may go, riving the earth and razing cities and killing tens of thousands, to kill that one fugitive? Earthquakes that deliberately pursue one fleeing man with deadly purpose?"

"Earthquakes following a man?" I repeated. "Why, the idea's mad! You surely don't think because you have been by coincidence in all these quakes of the last two years——"

"I don't think," he said, "I know. I know that the quakes you speak of have pursued me across earth in the last two years with deadly purpose! Even today, two hours after I landed in this city, they have shown me that they are still after me!"

"Landon, you can't believe this!" I expostulated. "Be reasonable, man—an earthquake is simply a movement of the earth's mass. How could such movements follow you deliberately?"

"I know how," he said, his eyes strange. "Travis and Skeel knew too, before they died. But I know and I still live, if only for a time.

"And I am going to tell you the thing, Morris. I know before the telling that you will find it impossible to believe, just as I would have two years ago. But in your unbelief remember this—that of all things in the universe we men know least really of this earth we live upon.

"IT HAS been over two years since Travis and Skeel and I started north on that trip of ours. We left St. Johns in a sturdy Canadian schooner built for arctic work, with a Canadian crew. The ship was to take us as far as northern Grant Land, and from there we three were going to work north ourselves on the last lap. Our objective was a great ice-mountain, its rock visible through openings in its icy sides, that was supposed to exist in the polar region some three hundred miles or more this side of the pole.

"We had heard of this polar mountain from several sources. It had been a matter of minor dispute between two different airplane expeditions that had flown over the pole. One claimed to have sighted the big ice-clad peak and the other claimed that it didn't exist. Travis and Skeel and I were going north to see if it did exist.

"If you know anything at all of geology you will know what such a polar mountain—a mountain in that icy desolation at the earth's top—would mean to geologists. It would prove beyond doubt the existence of a polar continent beneath the ice and might throw a flood of light on things that have puzzled geological science. The three of us were afire to find out if such a peak did exist in the north polar region.

"The north pole, you know, like the south one, is more a region than a point. The earth is oblate, flattened at top and bottom, and that flat region around the northern pole is in fact the top or forefront of earth. In that great icy expanse the mountain was supposed to exist, and Travis and Skeel and I were bent on finding it. So we sailed north from St. Johns with our schooner loaded with equipment.

"The schooner crept northward for two months through icy channels toward the northern tip of Grant Land. Travis and Skeel and I were busy making ready our equipment. At North Devon we picked up two Eskimos who were to make the final trip with us, two sturdy fellows named Noskat and Shan. Our sledges and dogs were ready, and when the ship reached the icy coast of Grant Land we were ready to start north on the final lap as soon as the freeze came.

"It came soon, and we started. Travis and Skeel and I, and Noskat and Shan, with the two sledges and dogs, headed

north over the frozen wastes. We carried felt tents, special chemical fuel of small bulk and weight, food and instruments, and an automatic apiece. Travis and Skeel and Noskat took the lead-sledge, Shan and I the other.

"For ten days we pushed north over endless ice-fields, making thirty miles a day. Ten days—three hundred miles—it doesn't sound so much, does it? Well, it was a cross-section of icy hell. Can you imagine a world in which all has turned to glittering ice that stretches to the horizon in eye-aching whiteness? A world in which the sickly polar day never ceases to shine? A world in which the polar cold closes down upon you like a hand, gripping through your numbed flesh to your bones?

"That was the kind of world we were moving through. Ten days—and they each seemed weeks long. We would wake, would eat half-warmed food and limber our stiffened muscles, then fold the tent and harness the dogs. And then north again, north over the ice desert's hummocks and ridges like pigmies traversing that vast white expanse. North, until on the tenth day we sighted the mountain.

"At first we could not believe our eyes. We had been pushing onward so mechanically that in the sheer struggle we had almost forgotten our mission. Then as our eyes took in that huge peak towering into the steely sky far ahead, ice-sheathed and with the dark openings in its sides, our exclamations came with a rush.

"We pushed on, little heeding difficulties then. In another day we were at the mountain's foot, a thousand feet below the lowest of the dark openings in its icy bulk.

"WE CAMPED there that night, exultant at reaching our goal. And there trouble began. The dogs had been whining strangely as we approached the mountain, needing the lash to make them go forward at all, and our two Eskimos had been muttering to themselves. Then no sooner had we pitched camp than there came a slight earth-tremor, a shock as of earth stirring underneath that made our tent quiver and the ice-fields round it crackle.

"To us it was somewhat surprizing to encounter an earth-tremor in this region, but that was all. But on Noskat and Shan, the two Eskimos, the tremor's effects were tremendous. Their swart faces grew positively livid with fear, they jabbered in their tongue for minutes, looking fearfully up toward the mountain's huge icy bulk, and then approached us in panic. By then the dogs had begun yelping strangely as though in terror.

" 'We can not stay here!' Noskat told us excitedly. 'This is the forbidden mountain at the earth's top—shunned by all our race! We knew not that this was your goal!'

" 'Forbidden mountain?' repeated Travis. 'Forbidden by whom?'

" 'Forbidden by the earth!' was Noskat's answer. 'The earth is living as we are living—it cares not how men move upon its vast living body as long as they do not approach this mountain!'

" 'The earth living? What the devil is all this about?' Travis demanded. Skeel intervened.

" 'It's an Eskimo belief, Travis,' he said. 'I've heard of it before—they think earth is a great living thing and that we humans are mere insects or the like living on its body.'

" 'What a crazy belief!' Travis commented. He turned back to Noskat. 'Why does your living earth forbid any one to come near this mountain, then?'

" 'Because this mountain holds earth's mind—earth's brain,' said Noskat solemnly, Shan nodding corroboration. 'Earth

likes us not to come this near its brain, and so it has moved its great body beneath us to warn us away.'

" 'Rot!' said Travis. 'That tremor just now wasn't any warning, but a slight earthquake like any other earthquake.'

" 'All earthquakes are but movements of earth's great body,' asserted Noskat stubbornly. 'Earth can move its body as it wishes.'

" 'That sounds logical enough, Travis,' I said, grinning.

"He turned toward me. 'Don't encourage them, Landon,' he said sharply. 'We'll have trouble enough with them as it is.'

"He swung back on Noskat and Shan. 'That tremor was just an ordinary tremor and this stuff about a living earth is nonsense,' he said forcibly. 'We are going to stay here two days at least and you two are going to camp down here while we explore and examine this mountain.'

" 'But you must not try to explore the mountain!' Noskat said excitedly. 'You dare not approach earth's brain! If you do——'

" 'That's enough!' snapped Travis. 'You and Shan are going to wait here while we do explore the mountain, and there'll be no more talk about it!'

"When Noskat and Shan had gone to their own tent Travis turned to us with a disgusted expression.

" 'This would be just our luck,' he said, 'to have those two, just as we get here, break loose with their superstitions.'

" 'I wonder if they're only superstitions,' said Skeel thoughtfully.

"We stared at him. 'What the devil!' I exclaimed. 'Do you believe that stuff about earth being a living and intelligent being?'

"Skeel's face was serious. 'I've heard of stranger things, Landon. Why couldn't earth be a living organism instead of just a mass of inanimate matter? It seems an inanimate mass to us, it is true, but so must a human being seem an inanimate mass to the microbes that live on and in that being. Earth might be a living organism, all the planets might be organisms, of scale and nature so different from us that we mites who swarm upon it can not even comprehend it. And if it is living it could possess consciousness and intelligence, perhaps intelligence operating on planes and for ends entirely alien to us.'

" 'And you think then that, as Noskat said, earth's brain is somewhere in this mountain?' Travis demanded incredulously.

"Skeel smiled. 'I don't say that. Though as a matter of fact if earth were a living and intelligent organism it would have to have the seat of its intelligence somewhere, and as likely up here at earth's top as anywhere.'

" 'I'll say you're a cuckoo geologist!' I exclaimed. 'You're as bad as those two Eskimos!'

"Travis stretched. 'Well, whether or not earth's brain is inside that mountain, we're going to do some climbing on it tomorrow morning.'

" 'And some climb it's going to be,' I told him. 'If we can get up far enough to get a look at that uncovered rock we'll be lucky.'

"We turned in, huddling in our furs, and though the dogs were still whining in a panicky fashion now and then, we fell almost instantly to sleep.

"WE WERE awakened when our watches told us it was morning by a sensation of some one shaking us, and found that it was another earth-tremor that was rocking the tent, one as strong as or stronger than that of the night before. It was over almost before we were awake, the grinding crackle of ice dying away.

"We struggled rapidly into our outer clothes and heard the dogs, who had yelped with terror when the tremor began, become silent as though cowed by utter fear. The tent still quivered from the tremor's last vibrations.

"Travis cursed. 'Another damned tremor! This will make those two swarthy sons of perdition harder than ever to handle, if I'm right.'

"His surmise proved correct, for we had not emerged from the tent into the polar cold and glare when Noskat and Shan were upon us. They were quite evidently in an extreme state of terror.

"According to them, the tremor was another and stronger sign that the earth was uneasy at our presence near its brain, and a warning for us to turn and head southward at all possible speed before earth destroyed us. They even went so far in their panic as to say that if we did not they would start south without us with one of the sledges.

"Travis' cold voice whipped to them through their terror. 'You'll stay here, all right,' he told them. 'You know too well what would happen to you if you showed up back down there at the ship without us.'

" 'But if you try to explore the mountain, earth's brain will be very wroth!' wailed Shan. 'All earth will be wroth against you!'

" 'I've had enough of this crazy talk about earth and its brain,' Travis told them impatiently. 'You two will stay here until we come back, or you'll go with us.'

"At that alternative both Noskat and Shan became silent out of sheer terror. I told them to see to the dogs, which were still acting strangely, and then with Travis and Skeel prepared for our climb up the icy mountain's side.

"As we could not hope to bring back any specimens, even if we succeeded in reaching one of the openings in the mountain's ice-sheath, we took only our ice-axes and a single rock-ax. We wore our automatics in our belts with the idea of impressing the two Eskimos if they still harbored ideas of flight, and we were roped together.

"With a final admonition and warning to Noskat and Shan from Travis, we started up the icy mountainside. A thousand feet above us was the dark circle in the ice we wanted to reach, an opening through the peak's frozen sheath, we were sure, to its inner rock. If we could make even a cursory examination of the mountain's rock-strata, we felt our trip would be worthwhile.

"FROM the first our climb was tremendously difficult. Travis led, cutting steps where needed with his ice-ax, taking advantage of ledges and cracks in the ice, moving tortuously up with Skeel and me close behind. Our heavy fur clothing was a hindrance to us in climbing, though even through it the polar cold penetrated.

"We were forced to rest every few yards, clinging against the icy slope like three strange furry animals. At such halts I looked down and for a time could see Noskat and Shan, down by the tents and sledges, watching our progress. Then an inward slant of the icy slope hid them from view for a time.

"This slant inward made climbing a little easier, and now we could plainly see the round opening in the ice above, and could make out that it opened through the ice to the dark bare rock of the mountain itself. That was a spur to our efforts and we struggled on, Travis' ax chipping steadily ahead of us, until at last Travis pulled himself up into the opening in the ice and then jerked us up beside him.

"We were hardly in that opening, lying

panting for the moment, when there came another earth-tremor, much more violent.

"It seemed that the whole mountain and the ice-fields around it were swaying and shaking, and there came as though from far beneath a crackling roar. We lay still and in a moment it ceased.

" 'Good Lord!' exclaimed Travis as we stood up then. 'If that had happened a moment ago when we were climbing it would have been bad for us.'

" 'Damn these tremors anyway!' I said. 'If that one has succeeded in scaring off Noskat and Shan I won't be surprized.'

"We peered down and saw them on the ice near the tents. They were on their knees, gesticulating in terror up toward us and the mountain. They made frantic motions for us to return.

"We shook our heads and Travis gestured sharply to them, ordering them to remain where they were. Their terror subsided a little, and he turned to us.

" 'They'll stay there, I think—they're more afraid to go back to the ship without us than to stay. But we'd best not stay up here too long ourselves.'

"Skeel had turned and was staring into the opening in the mountain's side, at whose edge we stood. 'Lord, look at this!' he exclaimed.

"We looked and were petrified with astonishment. The opening in which we stood was the mouth of a round tunnel that slanted straight back and downward into the mountain's mighty mass.

"This tunnel was thirty feet in diameter and ran inward toward the mountain's center in a slight downward grade, as straight as though it had been gouged by a huge punch.

"There was no ice in the tunnel, though a steady current of air rushed down it. We examined the black rock of its walls quickly, then again with mounting excitement. It was a geologist's nightmare. This mountain's rock was stratumless, a smooth black rock that might have come from earth's innermost mass!

" 'I'll say we've found something here!' cried Travis excitedly. 'Why, this rock is pre-igneous even—it's a kind of rock geology's not even heard of!'

" 'But this opening, this tunnel leading down into the mountain?' I asked. 'What could have formed it?'

" 'God knows, Landon. But the other openings we saw in the mountain's ice-sides must be the mouths of similar tunnels! And they must lead down to some central opening or space, for there are air-currents in this one!'

"Travis unhooked from his belt his flat metal electric torch and sent its ray down the dark tunnel's length. The quivering little beam wavered down through the next few hundred feet of the tunnel but showed only the same smooth black rock sides.

" 'The only way we'll find out what this tunnel leads to down there is to follow it and see,' said Travis. 'Come on, you two.'

"We started down the tunnel. Its grade was not steep enough to make it perilous, though its floor like its sides was so smooth as to make footing difficult. We had a hard time to keep our footing when, a moment or so later, there came another tremor that swayed the mountain so that the tunnel's floor seemed to pitch beneath us.

"By then we were too excited over the geological strangeness of the tunnel and the black rock and the whole mountain to mind the tremor. We pressed on, Travis' quivering beam preceding us, with the circle of white light that was the tunnel's mouth dwindling and disappearing behind and above us. We paid no more attention to another tremor

that shook us a few moments later, or to still another that followed that one closely.

"WITHIN a quarter-hour we had followed the tunnel downward for a half-mile and had found that it curved slightly now instead of running straight as heretofore, but led still in a general direction down toward the mountain's center. By then, too, the tremors and quakings of the mountain and earth around it had become practically continuous.

"The tunnel's walls were swaying unceasingly around us, not violently but noticeably, and the sound of these continued earth-movements was now a tremendous monotone of rumblings and mutterings from far beneath. The strangeness of these continued tremors penetrated through even our excitement and we stopped in the tunnel's curve we were passing through, Travis flashing his beam ahead and behind.

" 'Damn queer, all these tremors at once!' he exclaimed. 'They seem to be getting worse, too.'

" 'I'm beginning to think this whole mountain is queer,' Skeel said. 'Tell me, have you two *felt* anything?'

"We stared at him. We *had* experienced with increasing strength a sensation so strange that neither Travis nor I had mentioned it. It was a sense of a tangible and powerful force that flooded out over and through us from ahead, a tingling force that had a strange effect upon my will.

"I can not describe that effect better than by saying that the farther down into the tunnel we went, the more did my own will and personality seem shared or usurped by some will or force utterly alien and different. In other words, that as I went on I was not only Clark Landon but something or a part of something vast and strange, whose will partly replaced Clark Landon's will in me.

" 'I've felt it, yes,' I told Skeel. 'But I didn't know you had. You too, Travis?'

"Travis nodded puzzledly. 'I've felt it also. There must be some center of radioactive or electrical force down in this mountain, and the closer we get to it the more it affects us.'

" 'But what about the tremors?' Skeel asked. 'Can we go on in the face of them and this other thing?'

" 'The devil with the tremors,' said Travis impatiently. 'There's something tremendous down inside this mountain and I say we go on, tremors or no tremors.'

" 'What do you think, Landon?' Skeel asked me. I looked doubtfully from him to Travis.

" 'After all, we've been in worse tremors than these,' I said, 'and I think Travis is right when he says there must be something tremendous down in this mountain.'

" 'I think there is, myself,' said Skeel, 'and I think that with these tremors it's warning us back!'

" 'Oh, rot!' said Travis. 'Are you going to start that silly notion of Noskat's about earth's brain being down here?'

" 'No, I'm with you two if you want to go on,' Skeel said.

" 'Then on it is!' I said. 'We can't go a great deal farther, anyway, for we can't spend too long a time down here.'

"We resumed our interrupted progress. The tunnel curved on downward, toward the mountain's heart. The currents of air still rushed down it unceasingly, making me wonder as we went on whether what thing of force was down here somehow drew or attracted those air-currents, through this and the other tunnels leading up to the mountain's sides.

"The tremors were somewhat more violent and it was evident that the whole mountain must be shaking. We moved on without commenting on them, though. It was hard work to keep our footing on the smooth swaying floor of the tunnel and we were thrown continually against its sides, sometimes with force. But we held to our downward progress, drawn by the mystery we were now sure this mountain held.

"For the strange force that beat upon us from ahead with increasing strength as we went on could only be mysterious and unheard of to our science, so strange it seemed. The sensation as of the impact of a colossal will was stronger and stronger. Can you imagine a will so mighty that mere nearness to it makes one feel its power as tangible force? That is what this alien force inside the mountain felt like to us.

"Skeel's face was becoming grave and even Travis seemed troubled as we went doubtfully on. The tremors by then had become really terrible, great roarings and shakings that swayed the tunnel's walls about us. But now so strange was everything, so dazing that vast, enigmatic force that beat stronger upon us from ahead, that we paid small attention.

"We rounded another long curve in the downward-slanting tunnel and saw ghostly glowing light ahead in it, heard a soft roar of steady sound over the grinding crash of shifting rock. Like puppets drawn by forces outside us, we pressed onward toward the light. As we neared it the impact of strange forces from ahead was almost stunning. There came a great last tremor that almost flung us from our feet. But even Skeel did not mind it, since in the moment it came we had reached the glowing light, had emerged suddenly from the dark tunnel into a great, glowing-lit space.

"We halted in it, stupefied. The tremors stopped altogether at that same moment, but only our subconscious minds registered the fact. We three were gazing across the great cavernous space into which the tunnel opened.

"IT SEEMED in that first stunned glance that this strange cavern must occupy most of the interior of the mountain, so huge was it. It must have been a half-mile in diameter, and was like the interior of a hollow cone. The mountain's dozen tunnels all opened down into it. It was lit by a quivering, glowing light which came from what was beyond doubt the most awesome and stupefying thing that ever man dared to look upon. I can not, even now, describe to you with one-tenth of its real terrible splendor, the thing that poised at the center of this cone-like cavern over the rock floor, the thing at which Travis and Skeel and I gazed.

"Can you imagine a great ovoid of pure light, like a huge egg in shape and a hundred feet high, poised upon its smaller end? That was what we three looked upon, a giant ovoid of light or force that towered there at the cone-cavern's center, emitting the light that illuminated it and also the enigmatic force that had beat upon us and the soft roar of sound we had heard.

"This ovoid was of all colors, it seemed. Its colors changed with incalculable swiftness like those of a racing cinema film. And those racing tints seemed to reproduce all the colors of the earth.

"The ovoid would flame for an instant with a red like that of devouring volcanic fires, of flowing flame. Then the red would be gone and instead would be a thread of blue, serene as the blue of mountain lakes. The blue would pass into

brown like the warm brown of fresh-turned soil, and that in turn into green like that of ocean's depths or yellow of earth's fantastic rocks.

"These colors changed and spun and swam in the great ovoid of light constantly, unceasingly. And just as in them seemed represented every natural color of earth, so in the soft roar of sound that came from the ovoid, there seemed merged and mingled all the natural sounds of earth.

"The crash of avalanches and thunder of slow-moving glaciers were in that roar; and the splitting of tortured rocks. One heard the howl of winds and the caressing whisper of soft breezes, the gurgling of small brooks and the hiss of rain and the smash of hurricanes and tidal waves. That roar of merged sound seemed issuing from a whispering-gallery open to all the sounds of earth.

"From the lower end of this huge poised ovoid of light branched scores of great tentacles of light, glowing arms that ran down into the rock floor of the cavern. They did not run into openings in that rock but into the rock itself, interpenetrating it as light interpenetrates glass. Somehow it seemed to me even in that first stunned moment that those light-tentacles branching down from the ovoid were of inconceivable length, that from where it poised here at the frozen top of the earth those arms of force or light penetrated down through all earth's mighty mass!

"As Travis and Skeel and I gazed now at the mighty ovoid, there shot suddenly from its lower end a new light-tentacle, as though forming suddenly. It darted across the cavern and encircled us three. Its grip was like that of solid steel rather than of glowing light, and with us in its grasp it darted back toward the great ovoid.

"We were held by this tentacle a score of feet from the ovoid. The scene was incredibly weird—the mighty cavern, the huge ovoid of light with its kaleidoscopic colors and roar of merged sounds and downward-branching tentacles, the arm of light that held Travis and Skeel and me in remorseless grip!

"It held us beneath the ovoid as though that immense thing of light from which it branched was contemplating us. And somehow in my mind then I knew without shadow of doubt that the ovoid *was* contemplating us, was examining and inspecting us by means of strange senses somewhere inside its glowing mass of light, senses having nothing to do with any senses we knew but operating on planes entirely different. Its vast will, mind, beat out on us tangibly.

"Skeel's cry came thinly to my ears over the soft roar of the towering ovoid. 'The brain of the earth! The Eskimos were right—it's the brain of the earth!'

" 'The brain of the earth! The Earth-Brain!' Travis and I mouthed the cry in stupefaction.

"For somehow we knew, knew absolutely, that it was the brain of the living earth that towered here and that held us, this awful ovoid of light poised in its mountain-chamber at the top of earth. This stupendous intelligence which saw and heard and somehow represented all the colors and sounds existing in its body, the earth! And whose light-tentacles ran down like animating sinews through its great earth-body!

"The Eskimos had been right. Their legends had told truth when they said that this mountain at the frozen top of earth held the brain of earth, and that it cared not how men moved upon its mighty earth-body so long as they approached not that body's brain, its self!

"For earth was but body to this great

brain! And just as microbes move upon a human body without even knowing that it is a living thing and not a great inanimate mass they exist on, so had men moved and lived upon its body, the earth, without ever dreaming that the huge body was animated by a vast kind of life so different from their own that they had deemed it lifeless!

"Men had moved and lived so upon the living earth for ages, generation after generation of tiny parasites upon it, but now three of those parasites in the person of ourselves had had the audacity to approach the earth's brain, here at earth's top; had disregarded the Earth-Brain's warning tremors of uneasiness at our approach and had penetrated despite them to its inmost chamber, here to the Earth-Brain itself that now had seized us and was examining us!

" 'Those tentacles of light!' Travis was yelling thinly in my ear. 'They must run down from this Earth-Brain like muscles through all earth!'

" 'Yes—we know now what caused those tremors, what causes earthquakes!' I cried.

"The light-tentacle drew us closer to the Earth-Brain! Can you picture that scene? The great ovoid of light holding us with one of its tentacles, inspecting us? Yes, the Earth-Brain was examining us as a man might take and examine three tiny parasites or insects whom he had not noticed upon his body until they became too bold!

"And still upon us, through us, beat the Earth-Brain's will! The impact of that will was tangible, overwhelming. It seemed partly to replace, to usurp, my own will and mind. It seemed that I was not only Clark Landon, but also part of the Earth-Brain that held me. By the strange, unhuman expressions of Travis and Skeel I knew they experienced the same thing.

"I FELT a withdrawal of interest from Clark Landon's petty affairs and viewpoints. My mind seemed to leap beyond his little concerns to infinitely vaster things. And yet I knew somewhere in my consciousness that it was not my own mind that leapt thus, but the mere reflection or echo in my mind of the Earth-Brain holding me.

"How can I tell what I seemed to feel? It was as though for the time I was part of that great Earth-Brain, was thinking as it thought and seeing things as it saw them. It was as though, like it, my mind was cased not in any tiny body of colloids and bones and blood-compounds, but in a vast body endowed with a totally different sort of life. As though my great body was a planet, its stupendous frame of stone and its circulating life-fluid the cataracts of flowing fire in its interior! As though all the multitudes of land and water forms of life that swarmed upon my vast body were as unnoticeable and unimportant to me, intent on my own vast affairs, as microbes to the human upon whose body they live.

"It seemed that I, the Earth-Brain now and not Clark Landon, sat here in this brain-chamber at the top of my earth-body. Poised here, I was as aware of all my great body as a man is of his arms and legs. For down into my earth-body ran the tentacles of light that extended to the uttermost parts of earth, the muscular system by which I moved my earth-body at will.

"I moved one of those mighty muscles of light and the answering movement of my earth-body was a great quake on the other side of earth! Another of my muscles twitched and an avalanche crashed somewhere else on earth! I paid

no attention whatever to the verminous tiny things dwelling upon my body, often annihilated in hordes by my earth-body's movements.

"And I, the Earth-Brain, and my great earth-body, were not stationary but moving! My great body was racing at awful speed through vast leagues of infinite space! Far off across those immensities of space I was aware of other living earths, other planets, some larger and some smaller than I, but each living in the same vast way as I lived, each with its own great Brain!

"Yes, and from those other living earths there came to me across the void messages, communications. I, Clark Landon, could not even dimly comprehend the nature of that communication which I, the Earth-Brain, carried on. But it was constant and unbroken, a strange speaking of living earth to earth across the void, an exchange of thoughts, of purposes——

"For purpose there was in the way in which I and those other mighty Brains moved our planet-bodies through space. It was not by mere blind chance, haphazardly, that we moved, but consciously, deliberately, carrying out together some vast purposeful design. Circling and moving with superhuman exactness, a colossal, geometrical march of vast living earth-things through space!

"And even as I, Clark Landon, thus seemed to share the superhuman viewpoints and purposes of the Earth-Brain that held us, so did I share dimly its attitude toward ourselves. In one part of my intelligence I was still Clark Landon, held with Travis and Skeel helpless by a thing of mystery and terror. But in another part of my mind I was the Earth-Brain, inspecting these three tiny parasites who had dared penetrate my brain-chamber.

"For I, the Earth-Brain, had never bothered in one way or another with the numberless verminous parasites that dwelt on my earth-body, except that when any had dared approach the mountain at my body's top that held encased myself, I had warned and driven them back by movements and tremors of my body.

"But these three had not been driven back but had come on with insane temerity until they had penetrated this dwelling-chamber of mine where none of their kind ever had penetrated before. And I, the Earth-Brain, had found their audacity so unprecedented and unexpected that I had grasped these three insect-things, was examining them!

"In so much did I, Clark Landon, share somehow the Earth-Brain's thoughts as those thoughts beat like tangible force through us. And I was aware, even as Travis and Skeel and I struggled vainly against the light-tentacle's grip, of the Earth-Brain's desire to inspect one of us more closely. I was not surprized when another light-tentacle whipped out from its base and grasped Skeel, raised him high in the air close beside the Earth-Brain, Travis and I still held by the first tentacle on the floor.

"Travis and I ceased our struggles, watched in a sort of paralysis of terror as Skeel was raised high beside the Earth-Brain. The glowing light of the great ovoid seemed to beat out through him as the tentacle turned him this way and that like a helpless puppet.

"The Earth-Brain was examining him, I knew, for there still held me that curious duality of mind in which I was at the same time Clark Landon and the Earth-Brain. Even as I, Landon, watched from below my comrade Skeel, I, the Earth-Brain, was inspecting curiously this tiny thing I held and concerning which I was casually interested.

"It was I, the Earth-Brain, who shot forth from myself another light-tentacle to grasp this tiny living thing. And then suddenly with a red crash of horror I was no longer the Earth-Brain at all but was Clark Landon, screaming wildly with Travis and shaking impotent little hands up at the Earth-Brain. For with those two tentacles it had casually torn Skeel's living body into halves!

"The tentacles held the two torn red things of broken flesh and bone that a moment before had been Herbert Skeel closer to the Earth-Brain's towering ovoid. The Earth-Brain was inspecting them, as calmly and dispassionately as a man might tear apart an insect and examine its interior structure.

" 'Skeel!' Travis was screaming raggedly over the unceasing soft roar. 'The thing's killed Skeel!'

" 'It's vivisected him!' I cried. 'I'll kill the damned thing—I'll kill it!'

"I was struggling insanely to reach the automatic in my belt, but held in the light-tentacle's grasp with Travis, I could not move my arms an inch.

"The Earth-Brain still was examining the broken body of Skeel. The great ovoid's changing colors still raced and swam, its roar of merged sounds unceasing and its mighty will still flooding tangibly through us and giving us that queer sense of identity with the Earth-Brain. But that sense was overwhelmed in me now by my wild fury at seeing Skeel, the comrade of Travis and myself for so long, slain so terribly before our eyes.

"TRAVIS and I were mouthing wild threats at the towering ovoid. The Earth-Brain paid no more attention to us than might a man to the waving antennæ of ants beneath his feet. It broke the halves of Skeel's body into smaller pieces. After a moment's inspection it dropped these red fragments, and the two tentacles that had held them shot down toward Travis and me!

"They grasped Travis and swung him up toward the Earth-Brain's side as Skeel had been swung, to vivisect him as Skeel had been vivisected. The other tentacle of light still held me on the floor. But in the moment Travis had been taken by the two, the grip of it upon me had perforce for an instant loosened, and in that instant I had ripped my pistol from my belt. Now as Travis was raised toward the Earth-Brain I aimed in a flash and fired a stream of steel-jacketed bullets up into the Earth-Brain's mighty ovoid of light.

"It was in the sheer madness of insane fury that I shot thus into the Earth-Brain, for I had no conscious hope of hurting in the least that terrific thing of tangible light and force in which its intelligence was embodied. But certain it is that even unconsciously I had no expectation of the cataclysmic reactions that took place the instant after my bullets tore into the Earth-Brain's ovoid of light.

"The Earth-Brain flamed pure crimson instantly, the crimson of leaping hell-fires and raging holocausts, the red of a superhuman, stupendous wrath. Colossal anger emanated from it at the same moment like a wave of destroying force, and as that cosmic wrath swept through me I knew that I had committed blackest sin against the universe in daring to attack the brain of the living earth-body upon which dwelt I and all my tiny race!

"And as the Earth-Brain blazed blinding crimson in rage, all its great tentacles or light-muscles whipped and twisted in a wild convulsion of insensate wrath! Travis was flung against the cavern's wall and smashed into red pulp by the impact; I was hurled as wildly and struck not the cavern wall but the mouth of the tunnel

down which we had come, and all earth seemed shaking with a tremendous grinding roar of shifting rock as the tentacles running down from the Earth-Brain into it convulsed.

"The Earth-Brain had for the moment gone mad with sheer rage and its earth-body was shaking and quaking in that mad spasm. I staggered to my feet. The mountain, the great cavern and the tunnel in whose mouth I was standing, were rocking about me like a leaf in the wind. The Earth-Brain, in its mad access of rage at having been attacked, had for the moment even forgotten me, who had dared make that attack, and was reacting in an insensate convulsion of fury that was shaking the whole upper part of its earth-body, the whole polar region!

"I stumbled away from that awful spectacle of the Earth-Brain's crimson-flaming ovoid of light, up into the tunnel. It was mindless terror that made me struggle up the tunnel whose terrific shakings flung me this way and that. I knew that in a moment when the Earth-Brain's first wild rage subsided it would remember me and its vengeance would crash upon me.

"I can not tell now for how many minutes I fought my way up that tunnel, thrown from my feet each time I staggered erect by the wild pitchings of the mountain around me; crawling crazily upward on hands and knees with the terrific grinding of rock-masses beneath and around me like the last roar of doom in my ears. I saw ahead the white circle of light that was the tunnel's opening just as the first awful quakes began to subside, as the Earth-Brain's first convulsive rage began to calm.

"I knew the Earth-Brain would now remember me and I flung myself forward, out of the dark tunnel into the daylight on the mountain's side. Below and far away stretched the glittering ice-fields but now they were heaved and rumpled like waves of a mighty sea, piling here and there in mountainous ridges and attesting the violence of the great quake that had just shaken them.

"Down the mountain's icy side I started by the path Travis and Skeel and I had cut in ascending. There came a roar from above and an avalanche of ice and rock poured down on me from the mountain's upper side. I flattened myself beneath the angle of the slant in the side and it roared over and past me. The Earth-Brain had indeed remembered, knew where I was upon its body and was seeking to slay me!

"Thrice it tried to destroy me as I struggled down the mountain's side. Twice other avalanches were shaken loose upon me, each almost annihilating me, and once the whole mountain shook violently as though to dislodge me and send me tumbling to death. God, what a weird progress was that of mine down the mountain, with the Earth-Brain, with earth itself, trying to destroy me!

"I DO not know yet by what chance I evaded those tremendous attacks and got to the ice-field at the mountain's bottom, bruised and terror-dazed. I looked to where our camp had been and there was but Noskat and one sledge and three dogs. Shan and the other sledge and dogs had been caught and annihilated by the shifting ice. Noskat ran toward me.

"He was babbling madly of the vengeance of the Earth-Brain, of the mighty quake that had killed Shan and the dogs and shaken terribly the earth itself. I cut him short, and we fled southward from the mountain over the ice-fields. Before we had travelled two hours a strong quake shook violently the ice over which

we were travelling. A crevice opened suddenly ahead of us that we almost fell into.

"Noskat cried to me that we might as well die, that we had offended the Earth-Brain and that wherever we went upon its body, the earth, it would know and would try to kill us. But I pressed on, motivated only by the insane desire to put more and more distance between myself and that towering ice-mountain in whose heart the Earth-Brain poised.

"The next week was like one in a strange inferno, an icy hell of cold in which we pushed south with the Earth-Brain's vengeance ever following closely. Nine times during that week we were menaced by violent quakes that shook the ice over which we travelled. How we escaped those suddenly-opening crevices and marching ice-ridges and terrific shocks, I can not now dream. Terror, a terror not of the quakes but of the Earth-Brain causing them, drove us on.

"It came to me during that week of hell that Travis and Skeel had been luckier in being slain outright by the Earth-Brain, than had I, with this remorseless vengeance of that mighty ovoid of light and intelligence pursuing me. Yet with that mad persistence that still actuated me, I pushed on. Toward the week's end Noskat's strength failed. With him in the sledge, dying and babbling of the Earth-Brain, I struggled south and at last reached the ship.

"To the ship's officers, who talked excitedly of the great cataclysm that had almost destroyed the vessel and that had seemed to center where Travis and Skeel and I had been, I lied. I said that there had been a terrific quake and that Travis and Skeel and Shan had been killed in it. Noskat died without regaining consciousness and there was none to contradict me. The ship started south.

"I prayed as we sailed southward that the Earth-Brain would pursue me no further, but I feared—I feared. My fear was justified, for as the ship passed close to the shore of Grinnell Land, a projecting glacier broke and hurled out a huge mass of ice that barely missed the ship. Two days later an undersea disturbance almost swamped us. The ship's crew talked of unsettled conditions, of earth-faults caused by the great polar quake; but I knew the truth, knew that my prayer was not answered and that still the Earth-Brain's vengeance followed me.

"We finally reached Halifax, and there I saw that the Earth-Brain would not reck of killing all my race if it could slay me, who had dared attack it. For, two days after we reached Halifax, came a terrible quake that destroyed half the city and killed thousands of its people. I escaped again, by the mere chance of being in an open park when the quake began.

"The newspapers quoted the scientists as saying, like the ship's men, that the great polar quake I had gone through had somehow caused faults in earth's interior structure which had resulted in this quake. I knew how far they were from the truth, knew the Earth-Brain had moved its vast earth-body and caused that quake solely to kill me.

"I fled from Halifax, whose dead seemed to point accusingly at me who had brought the Earth-Brain's death upon them. I took a boat to Norway and the day I arrived there came a quake that did great damage. By then I knew enough to stay out of buildings that might crash upon me, even sleeping in the open air. I went on from Norway to Russia.

"Russia had a series of three devastating quakes, the third one of which almost got me despite my precautions. When I fled on to Egypt it was worse,

for my presence in Alexandria brought a quake and tidal wave that killed more innocent thousands. When I headed north again to Italy, the peninsula was racked by unprecedented quakes and landslides during my stay. And when I went on to England the quakes followed me.

"I knew that sooner or later, despite my carefulness to stay out of buildings and away from mountains and hills that might loose avalanches on me, one of these quakes would get me, the Earth-Brain's vengeance would find me. But I fled on, took a boat home. I arrived in New York today, and you, Morris, saw what happened.

"You saw that when I had not been in New York more than a few hours there came an earth-tremor. To the people here it seemed only a tremor. But to me it was warning and knowledge, knowledge that the Earth-Brain knew of my presence here, that it was still seeking to slay me with the movements of its great earth-body.

"Yes, following me still with deadly purpose! And that is why I dare not stay here in New York, Morris. If I did stay, sooner or later the Earth-Brain would again attempt to kill me with an earthquake or tidal wave that might kill more innocent thousands or tens of thousands here. I have the blood of enough people now on my head without wanting more killed on my account. So I must go on, must leave here now before I bring doom on New York from the Earth-Brain's endeavors to take my life."

THAT was the story Clark Landon told me in my New York apartment the morning of the tremor. He left the city despite all I could say, a few hours afterward. I parted from him at the station where he took a train to New Orleans. I never saw Landon again but I followed his movements from that time until the end, and will summarize them briefly here.

The train Landon took to New Orleans was derailed by a sudden earth-tremor when a few hundred miles from its destination. Landon escaped, according to the newspaper casualty lists, though a score of people were killed and more injured. There were several earth-shocks of varying violence while Landon was in New Orleans, but they ceased after he took a banana boat to Mexico.

Ten days later I read of a violent quake that had destroyed the town of Tegulcipan, in northern Mexico, and the neighboring villages of Causo and Santlione. The newspaper dispatches estimated the dead at fifty and mentioned the escape of an American staying in Tegulcipan, Clark Landon.

Landon went southward and a more or less continuous series of earthquakes followed him. At Progreso, in Yucatan, a double quake laid practically every structure in ruins and slew three-fourths of the population. Again I saw Clark Landon mentioned as one who had escaped, and it was said he had started for Guatemala.

At Guatemala came the end. The day after Landon arrived came the first terrifying rumblings of an earthquake of tremendous violence. The radio and cable stories told of the unexpected suddenness with which the earth heaved violently and with which vast crevices began opening in it. They told also of the curious suicide of an American named Clark Landon, which took place as the quake started.

According to these dispatches, Landon when the quake started had rushed into the street along which crevices were opening and had shouted madly as though

adjuring someone or something to stop the quake. The shocks becoming each moment more violent, Landon had shouted something about surrendering himself and stopping these quakes devastating earth, and had rushed to the nearest crevice and thrown himself into it. According to those who saw, the crevice closed instantly upon him.

With Landon's death the quake stopped almost at once, the tremors subsiding. Though a few of Guatemala's buildings were shaken down and much glass shattered, there was no other damage and so Guatemala had cause for rejoicing. It was only after the first sensational stories of the quake and its sudden stop had filled the papers that they carried the minor detail of Landon's strange suicide.

The quake at Guatemala was the last of the series of earthquakes that for almost two years had wrought destruction over earth's surface. There have been minor tremors and movements since, of course, but no such succession of cataclysms as that which began with the great polar quake and moved here and there over earth until it ended at Guatemala.

That is all of the story, and I, Morris, intend to attach to it no explanation or attempt at explanation. It must end not with explanations but with questions, questions that may have their answer in known natural causes or that can be answered, perhaps, only by the incredible tale Clark Landon told me that morning.

Was that tale the literal truth? Did Landon and Travis and Skeel actually penetrate that icy mountain at earth's top to find there the Earth-Brain, the vast mind that has this earth for body? Was it because Landon attacked that Earth-Brain that for two years earth was racked by quakes?

Certain it is that that terrible series of quakes did follow Landon over earth's surface. Whether that was by coincidence only, or whether those quakes were the deliberate movements of its huge earth-body by which the Earth-Brain was striving to kill Landon, as he believed, there will be different minds.

And what of that last quake at Guatemala, where Landon flung himself into the crevice after madly adjuring the Earth-Brain to stop its destruction? There can be no doubt that Landon saw himself as bringing endless death and destruction on innocent cities and peoples by his mere continued living, and that he felt at last that only by sacrificing himself would the Earth-Brain's vengeance be satisfied, and the quakes cease.

Here again it is certain that no sooner had Landon flung himself into that crevice in the Guatemala street than the quake there stopped, the whole series of quakes stopped. Was that too by chance only? Or was it that Landon's sacrifice was not in vain, that with his death the Earth-Brain's revenge was accomplished?

It is with such questions and not with explanations, as I said, that the story must end. We can not say whether up in its mountain-chamber at earth's top sits that mighty ovoid of sentient light that Landon called the Earth-Brain, whether we who consider ourselves masters of all are not but a race of microscopic parasites dwelling upon the vast and strangely living body of that Earth-Brain. It may be that we shall never be able to say, and I think that that is best. I think it is infinitely best that we, who know so much so certainly, do not know this thing.

Mrs. Lorriquer

By HENRY S. WHITEHEAD

A West Indian story of possession and dual personality, by the author of the "Jumbee" tales

THE late Ronald Firbank, British author, apostle of the light touch in literary treatment, put grass skirts upon the three lady heroines of his West Indian book, *Prancing Nigger*, as all persons who have perused that delicate romance of an unnamed West Indian island will doubtless remember. In so dressing Mrs. Mouth, and her two attractive daughters, Mr. Firbank was only twelve thousand miles out of the way, although that is not bad for anybody who writes about the West Indies —almost conservative, in fact. I, Gerald Canevin, have more than once reassured timid female inquirers, who had heard of our climate, but who were apprehensive of living among "those savages and cannibals!"

I have always suspected that Mr. Firbank, to go back for a moment to that gentleman before dismissing him and his book, got his light-touch information about the West Indies from a winter tour aboard one of the great trans-Atlantic liners which, winters, are used for such purposes in the Mediterranean and Caribbean, and which, in St. Thomas, discharge their hundreds of "personally conducted" tourists in swarms upon our innocent, narrow sidewalks, transforming the quiet, Old World town into a seething, hectic market-place for several hours every two weeks or so during a winter's season there.

For, truth being stranger by far than any fiction, there *are* grass skirts—on such occasions—on St. Thomas' streets; piles and stacks of them, for sale to tourists who buy them avidly. I know of no more engaging sight in this world than a two hundred and fifty pound tourist-lady, her husband in the offing, his hand in his money-pocket, chaffering with one of our Cha-Cha women with her drab, flat face and tight-pulled, straight hair knotted at the back, for a grass skirt!

It appears that, some years back, a certain iron-visaged spinster, in the employ of a social service agency, "took up" the Cha-Cha women, seeking to brighten their lot, and, realizing that a certain native raffia grass had commercial possibilities, taught them to make Polynesian grass skirts of it. Thereafter and ever since there has been a vast plague of these things about the streets of St. Thomas whenever a tourist vessel comes into our harbor under the skilled pilotage of Captain Simmons or Captain Caroc, our pilots.

I open this strange tale of Mrs. Lorriquer in this offhand fashion because my first sight of that compact, gray-haired little American gentlewoman was when I passed her, in the very heart and midst of one of these tourist invasions, rather indignantly trying to get rid of an insistent vender who seemed possessed to drape her five feet two, and one hundred and sixty pounds, in a five-colored grass skirt, and who would not be appeased

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"I advanced straight upon him."

and desist. As I was about to pass I overheard Mrs. Lorriquer say, with both indignation and finality:

"But, I'm not a tourist—I live here!"

That effectually settled the grass-skirt seller, who turned her attention to the tourists forthwith.

I had paused, almost unconsciously, and found myself face to face with Mrs. Lorriquer, whom I had not seen before. She smiled at me and I smiled back.

"Will you allow another permanent resident to rescue you from this mêlée?" I inquired, removing my hat.

"It is rather like a Continental *mardi gras,* isn't it?" said Mrs. Lorriquer, taking my arm.

"Where are you staying?" I inquired. "Are you at the Grand Hotel?"

"No," said Mrs. Lorriquer. "We have a house, the Criqué place, half-way up Denmark Hill. We came down the day before yesterday, on the *Nova Scotia,* and we expect to be here all winter."

"I am Gerald Canevin," said I, "and I happen to be your very near neighbor. Probably we shall see a good deal of each other. If I can be of any assistance——"

"You have, already, Mr. Canevin," said Mrs. Lorriquer, whimsically.

I supposed at once she referred to my "rescue" of her from the tourist mob, but, it seemed, she had something quite different in her mind.

"It was because of some things of yours we had read," she went on, "that Colonel Lorriquer and I—and my widowed daughter, Mrs. Preston—decided to spend the winter here," she finished.

"Indeed!" said I. "Then, perhaps, you will allow me to continue the responsibility. When would it meet your convenience for me to call and meet the Colonel and Mrs. Preston?"

"Come any time," said Mrs. Lorriquer, "come to dinner, of course. We are living very informally."

We had reached the post-office, opposite the Grand Hotel, and here, doubtless according to instructions, stood Mrs. Lorriquer's car. I handed her in, and the kindly-faced, short, stout, little sixty-year-old lady was whirled away around the corner of the hotel toward one of the side roads which mount the precipitous sides of St. Thomas' best residential district.

I CALLED the following afternoon, and thus inaugurated what proved to be a very pleasant acquaintanceship.

Colonel Lorriquer, a retired army engineer, was a man of seventy, extraordinarily well preserved, genial, a ripened citizen of the world. He had, it transpired on acquaintance, had a hand in many pieces of engineering, in various parts of the known world, and had spent several years on that vast American enterprise, the construction of the Panama Canal. Mrs. Preston, whose aviator husband had met his death a few months previously in the exercise of his hazardous profession, turned out to be a very charming person, still stunned and overburdened with the grief of her bereavement, and with two tiny children. I gathered that it was largely upon her account that the Colonel and Mrs. Lorriquer had come to St. Thomas that winter. Being a West Indian enthusiast, it seemed to me that the family had used excellent judgment. There could be no better place for them under those circumstances. There is that in the charm and perfect climate of the Northern Lesser Antilles which heals the wounds of the heart, even though, as they say, when one stays too long there is Lethe.

We settled down in short order to a more or less intimate acquaintanceship. The Lorriquers, and Mrs. Preston, were, so to speak, "my sort of people." Many mutual acquaintances developed as we became better acquainted. We found much in common.

I have set down all this preliminary portion of this story thus in detail, because I have wished to emphasize, if possible, the fact that never, in all my experiences with the bizarre which this human scene offers to the open-minded observer, has it occurred to me to find any greater contrast than that which existed between Mrs. Lorriquer, short, stout, matter-of-fact, kindly little lady that she was, and the quite utterly incredible thing which—but I must not, I simply must not, in this case, allow myself to get ahead of my story. God knows it is strange enough not to need any "literary devices" to make it seem stranger. . . .

The Lorriquers spent a good deal of the time which, under the circumstances, hung upon their hands, in card-playing. All three members of the family were expert Auction and Contract players. Naturally, being quite close at hand, I became a fourth and many evenings not otherwise occupied were spent, sometimes at my house, sometimes at theirs, about the card-table.

The Colonel and I played together, against the two ladies, and this arrangement was very rarely varied. Occasionally Mrs. Squire, a middle-aged woman who had known the Lorriquers at home in the States, and who had an apartment

at the Grand Hotel for the winter, joined us, and then, usually, Mrs. Preston gave up her place and Mrs. Squire and I paired against the Colonel and his wife.

EVEN after the lapse of several years, I confess that I find myself as I write, hesitant, reluctant somehow, to set down the beginning of the strange discrepancy which first indicated what was to come to light in our innocent social relationship that winter. I think I can best do so, best open up this incredible thing, by recording a conversation between me and Mrs. Squire as we walked, one moonlit midnight, slowly down the hill toward the Grand Hotel.

We had finished an evening at the Lorriquers, and Mrs. Lorriquer had been especially, a little more than ordinarily, rude over the cards. Somehow, I can not say how it occurred, we discussed this strange anomaly in our hostess, usually the most kindly, simple, hospitable soul imaginable.

"She only does it when she plays cards," remarked Mrs. Squire. "Otherwise, as you have said, Mr. Canevin, she is the very soul of kindliness, of generosity. I have never been able to understand, and I have known the Lorriquers for more than ten years—how a woman of her character and knowledge of the world can act as she does over the card-table. It would be quite unbearable, quite utterly absurd—would it not—if one didn't *know* how very sweet and dear she really is."

It was, truly, a puzzle. It had developed very soon after we had started in at our Bridge games together. The plain fact, to set it down straight, was that Mrs. Lorriquer, *at the card-table*, was a most pernicious old termagant! A more complete diversity between her as she sat, frowning over her cards; exacting every last penalty; enforcing abstruse rules against her opponents while taking advantage of breaking them all herself *ad libitum;* arguing, most inanely and even offensively, over scores and value of points and penalties—all of her actions and conduct at the card-table; with her general placidity, kindliness, and effusive good-nature under all other circumstances—a more complete diversity, I say, could never be imagined.

It has always been one of my negative principles that annoyance over the details or over the outcome of any game of chance or skill should never be expressed. That sort of thing has always seemed to me absurd; indeed, inexcusable. Yet, I testify, I have, and increasingly as our acquaintance progressed, been so worked up over the cards when playing with the Lorriquer family, as to have to put the brakes down tight upon some expression of annoyance which I should later have regretted. Indeed, I will go farther, and own up to the fact that I have been badgered into entering into arguments with Mrs. Lorriquer at the table, when she would make some utterly outrageous claim, and then argue—the only word for it is *offensively*—against the massed testimony of her opponents and her partner for the evening. More than once, Mrs. Preston, under the stress of such an exhibition of temper and unreasonableness on her mother's part, has risen from the table, making some excuse, only to return a few minutes later. I believe that on all such occasions, Mrs. Preston took this means of allowing her annoyance to evaporate rather than express herself to her mother in the presence of a guest.

To say that it was annoyance is to put it very mildly indeed. It was embarrassing, too, to the very last degree. The subjects upon which Mrs. Lorriquer would "go up in the air," as Mrs. Squire once modernly expressed it, were always trivial; always unreasonable. Mrs. Lorriquer, although

a finished player in all respects, was, I think, always, as a matter of fact, in the wrong. She would question the amount of a score, for example, and, upon being shown the printed penalties for such score on the cover-page of the score pad, or from one of the standard books on the game, would shift over to a questioning of the score itself. The tricks, left on the table, would be counted out to her, before her eyes, by Colonel Lorriquer. Halfway through such an ocular demonstration, Mrs. Lorriquer would interrupt her husband with some kind of diatribe, worthy the mind of a person quite utterly ignorant of the game of Contract and of decent manners. She insisted upon keeping all scores herself, but unless this process were very carefully watched and checked, she would, perhaps half the time, cheat in favor of her own side.

It was, really, outrageous. Time and time again, I have gone home from the Lorriquers, after such an evening as I have indicated, utterly resolved never to play there again, or to refuse, as courteously as might be possible, to meet Mrs. Lorriquer over a card-table. Then, the next day, perhaps, the other Mrs. Lorriquer, charming, kindly, sweet-natured, gentle and hospitable, would be in such overwhelming, disarming evidence, that my overnight resolution would be dissipated into thin air, and I would accuse myself of becoming middle-aged, querulous!

But this unaccountable diversity between the Mrs. Lorriquer of ordinary affairs and the Mrs. Lorriquer of the card-table, outstanding, conspicuous, absurd indeed, as it was, was really as nothing when compared to Mrs. Lorriquer's luck at the cards.

I have never seen anything like it; never heard, save in old-fashioned fictional tales of the person who sold his soul to Satan for invincibility at cards, of anything which could compare to it. It is true that Mrs. Lorriquer sometimes lost —a single game, or perhaps even a rubber. But, in the long run, Mrs. Lorriquer, even on the lowest possible basis for expressing what I mean, did not need to cheat, still less to argue over points or scores. She won, steadily, inevitably, monotonously, like the steady propulsive motions of some soulless machine at its mechanical work. It was virtually impossible to beat her.

We did not play for stakes. If we had, a goodly portion of my income would have been diverted that winter to the Lorriquer coffers. Save for the fact that as it was the Colonel who played partners with me, it would have been Mrs. Lorriquer, rather than the Lorriquer family, who would have netted all the proceeds!

In bidding, and, indeed, in the actual playing of a hand, she seemed to follow no system beyond abject reliance on her "luck." I have, not once, but many, many times, known her, for example, to bid two no trumps originally, on a hand perhaps containing two "singletons," only to have her partner "go to three" with a hand containing every card which she needed for the dummy. I will not specify, beyond this, any technical illustrations of how her extraordinary "luck" manifested itself. Suffice it to say that Bridge is, largely, a mathematical matter, varied, in the case of four thoroughly trained players, by what is known as the "distribution" of the cards. It is this unknown element of "distribution" which keeps the game, in the hands of a table of experts, a "game of chance" and not merely a mathematical certainty gaged by skilful, back-and-forth, informative bidding. To put the whole matter of Mrs. Lorriquer's "luck" into a nutshell, it was this element of "distribution" of the cards which favored her, in and out of season; caused her to win with a continu-

ous regularity; never seeming to cause her to be pleased at her success and so lend to an evening at cards with her at the table that rather unsatisfactory geniality which even a child shows when it "gets the breaks" at a game.

No; Mrs. Lorriquer was, while engaged in playing Bridge, a harridan, a disagreeable old vixen; a "pill" as, I believe, I once heard the outraged Mrs. Squire mutter desperately, under her breath!

Perhaps it would be an exaggeration to allege that as against the Colonel and me, playing as partners for many evenings, the "distribution" of the cards was adverse with absolute unformity. I should hesitate to say that, positively, although my recollection is that such was the case. But, in the ordinary run of affairs, once in a while one of us would get a commanding hand, and, immune from the possibility of the "distribution" affecting success, would play it out to a winning score for the time being. It was after one such hand—I played it, the Colonel's hand as dummy—that I succeeded in making my bid: four hearts, to a game. I remember that I had nine hearts in my hand, together with the ace, king of clubs, and "stoppers" on one other suit, and finishing with something "above the line" besides "making game" in one hand, that my first intimation of a strange element in Mrs. Lorriquer's attitude to the game made itself apparent. Hitherto—it was, perhaps, a matter of a month or six weeks of the acquaintance between us—it had been a combination of luck and what I can only call bad manners; the variety of luck which I have attempted to indicate and the "bad manners" strictly limited to such times as we sat around the square table in the center of the Lorriquers' breezy hall.

The indication to which I have referred was merely an exclamation from my right, where Mrs. Lorriquer sat, as usual, in her accustomed place.

"Sapristi!" boomed Mrs. Lorriquer, in a deep, resonant, man-like voice.

I looked up from my successful hand and smiled at her. I had, of course, imagined that she was joking—to use an antique, rather meaningless, old-French oath, in that voice. Her own voice, even when scolding over the card-table, was a light, essentially feminine voice. If she had been a singer, she would have been a thin, high soprano.

To my surprize, Mrs. Lorriquer was not wearing her whimsical expression. At once, too, she entered into an acrimonious dispute with the Colonel over the scoring of our game-going hand, as usual, insisting on something quite ridiculous, the old Colonel arguing with her patiently.

I glanced at Mrs. Preston to see what she might have made of her mother's exclamation in that strange, unaccustomed, incongruous voice. She was looking down at the table, on which her hands rested, a pensive and somewhat puzzled expression slightly puckering her white forehead. So far as I could guess from her expression she, too, had been surprized at what she had heard. Apparently, I imagined, such a peculiar manifestation of annoyance on Mrs. Lorriquer's part was as new to her daughter as it was to me, still a comparative stranger in that family's acquaintance.

We resumed play, and, perhaps an hour or more later, it happened that we won another rather notable hand, a little slam, carefully bid up, in no trumps, the Colonel playing the hand. About half-way through, when it was apparent that we were practically sure of our six over-tricks, I noticed, being, of course, unoccupied, that Mrs. Lorriquer, at my right, was muttering to herself, in a peculiarly ill-natured, querulous way she

had under such circumstances, and, my mind stimulated by the remembrance of her use of the old-French oath, I listened very carefully and discovered that she was muttering in French. The most of it I lost, but the gist of it was, directed toward her husband, a running diatribe of the most personal and even venomous kind imaginable.

Spanish, as I was aware, Mrs. Lorriquer knew. She had lived in the Canal Zone for a number of years, and elsewhere where the Colonel's professional engagements as an engineer had taken them, but, to my knowledge, my hostess was unacquainted with colloquial French. The mutterings were distinctively colloquial. She had, among other things, called her husband in those mutterings "the accursed child of a misbegotten frog," which is, however inelegant on the lips of a cultivated elderly gentlewoman, at least indicative of an intimate knowledge of the language of the Frankish peoples! No one else sensed it—the foreign tongue, I mean—doubtless because both other players were fully occupied, the Colonel in making our little slam, Mrs. Preston in doing what she could to prevent him, and besides, such mutterings were common on Mrs. Lorriquer's part; were usual, indeed, on rare occasions when a hand at Bridge was going against her and her partner. It was the use of the French that intrigued me.

A FEW days later, meeting her coming down the hill, a sunny smile on her kindly, good-humored face, I addressed her, whimsically, in French. Smilingly, she disclaimed all knowledge of what I was talking about.

"I supposed you were a French scholar, somehow," said I.

"I really don't know a word of it," replied Mrs. Lorriquer, "unless, perhaps, what 'R. S. V. P.' means, and—oh, yes! —*'honi soit qui mal y pense!'* That's on the great seal of England, isn't it, Mr. Canevin?"

It set me to wondering, as, I imagine, it would have set anyone under just those circumstances, and I had something to puzzle over. I could not, you see, readily reconcile Mrs. Lorriquer's direct statement that she knew no French, a statement made with the utmost frankness, and to no possible end if it were untrue, with the fact that she had objurgated the Colonel under her breath and with a surprizing degree of fluency, as "the accursed child of a misbegotten frog!"

It seemed, this little puzzle, insoluble! There could, it seemed to me, be no possible question as to Mrs. Lorriquer's veracity. If she said she knew no French besides the trite phrases which everybody knows, then the conclusion was inevitable; she knew no French! But—beyond question she had spoken, under her breath to be sure, but in my plain hearing, in that language and in the most familiar and colloquial manner imaginable.

There was, logically, only one possible explanation. *Mrs. Lorriquer had been speaking French without her own knowledge!*

I had to let it go at that, absurd as such a conclusion seemed to me.

But, pondering over this apparent absurdity, another point, which might have been illuminating if foresight were as satisfactory as "hindsight," emerged in my mind. I recalled that what I have called "the other Mrs. Lorriquer" was an especially gentle, kindly person, greatly averse to the spoiling of anybody's good time! The normal Mrs. Lorriquer was, really, almost softly apologetic. The least little matter wherein anything which could possibly be attributed to her had gone wrong would always be the subject of an explanation, an apology. If the

palm salad at one of her luncheons or dinners did not seem to her to be quite perfect, there would be deprecatory remarks. If the limes from which a little juice was to be squeezed out upon the halved papayas at her table happened not to be of the highest quality, the very greenest of green limes that is, Mrs. Lorriquer would lament the absence of absolutely perfect limes that morning when she had gone in person to procure them from the market-place. In other words, Mrs. Lorriquer carried almost to the last extreme her veritable passion for making her guests enjoy themselves, for seeing to it that everybody about her was happy and comfortable and provided with the best of everything.

But—it occurred to me that she never apologized afterward for any of her exhibitions at the card-table.

By an easy analogy, the conclusion—if correct—was inevitable. Mrs. Lorriquer, apparently, did not at all realize that she was a virtually different person when she played cards.

I pondered this, too. I came to the conclusion that, queer as it seemed, this was the correct explanation of her extraordinary conduct.

But—such an "explanation" did not carry one very far, that was certain. For at once it occurred to me as it would have occurred to anybody else, her husband and daughter for choice, that there must be something behind this "explanation". If Mrs. Lorriquer "was not herself" at such times as she was engaged in playing cards, what made her that way? I recalled, whimsically, the remark of a small child of my acquaintance whose mother had been suffering from a devastating sick-headache. Lillian's father had remarked:

"Don't trouble Mother, my dear. Mother's not herself this afternoon, you see."

"Well," countered the puzzled Lillian, "who is she, then, Daddy?"

It was, indeed, in this present case, quite as though Mrs. Lorriquer were somebody else, somebody quite different from "herself" whenever she sat at the card-table. That was as far as I could get with my attempt at any "explanation".

The "somebody else", as I thought the matter through, had three known characteristics. First, an incredibly ugly disposition. Second, the ability to speak fluently a language unknown to Mrs. Lorriquer. Third, at least as manifested on one occasion, and evidenced by no more than the booming utterance of a single word, a deep, man-like, bass voice!

I stopped there in my process of reasoning. The whole thing was too absurdly bizarre for me to waste any more time over it along that line of reasoning. As to the obvious process of consulting Colonel Lorriquer or Mrs. Preston, their daughter, on such a subject, that was, sheerly, out of the question. Interesting as the problem was to me, one simply does not do such things.

THEN, quite without any warning, there came another piece of evidence. I have mentioned our St. Thomas Cha-Chas, and also that Mrs. Lorriquer was accustomed to visit the market-place in person in the interest of her table. The St. Thomas Cha-Chas form a self-sustaining, self-contained community as distinct from the rest of the life which surrounds them in their own "village" set on the seashore to the west of the main portion of the town as oil from water. They have been there from time immemorial, the local "poor whites", hardy fishermen, faithful workers, the women great sellers of small hand-made articles (like the famous grass skirts) and garden produce. They are inbred, from a long living in a very small community of

their own, look mostly all alike, and, coming as they did many years ago from the French island of St. Bartholomew, most of them when together speak a kind of modified Norman French, a peasant dialect of their own, although all of them know and use a simplified variety of our English tongue for general purposes.

Along the streets, as well as in the public market-place, the Cha-Cha women may be seen, always separate from the negress market-vendors, offering their neddlework, their woven grass baskets and similar articles, and the varying seasonal fruits and vegetables which they cultivate in their tiny garden patches or gather from the more inaccessible distant groves and ravines of the island—mangoes, palmets, sugar-apples, the strange-appearing cashew fruits, every variety of local eatable including trays of the most villainous-appearing peppermint candy, which, upon trial, is a truly delicious confection.

Passing the market one morning I saw Mrs. Lorriquer standing in a group of five or six Cha-Cha market women who were outvying one another in presenting the respective claims of various trays loaded with the small, red, round tomatoes in which certain Cha-Cha families specialize. One of the women, in her eagerness to attract the attention of the customer, jostled another, who retaliated upon her in their own familiar tongue. An argument among the women broke out at this, several taking sides, and in an instant Mrs. Lorriquer was the center of a tornado of vocables in Cha-Cha French.

Fearing that this would be annoying to her, I hastened across the street to the market-place, toward the group, but my interference proved not to be required. I was, perhaps, half-way across when Mrs. Lorriquer took charge of the situation herself, and with an effectiveness which no one could have anticipated. In that same booming voice with which she had ejaculated *"Sapristi!"* and in fluent, positively *Apache* French, Mrs. Lorriquer suddenly put a benumbing silence upon the bickering market women, who fell back from her in an astounded silence, so sudden a silence that clear and shrill came the comment from a near-by Black woman balancing a tray loaded to the brim with avocado pears upon her kerchiefed head, listening, pop-eyed, to the altercation.

"Ooh, me Gahd!" remarked the negress to the air about her. "Whoite missy tahlk to they in Cha-Cha!"

It was only a matter of seconds before I was at Mrs. Lorriquer's side.

"Can I be of any assistance?" I inquired.

Mrs. Lorriquer glared at me, looking precisely as she did when engaged in one of her querulous, acrimonious arguments at the card-table. Then her countenance changed with a startling abruptness, and she looked quite as usual.

"I was just buying some of these lovely little tomatoes," she said.

The Cha-Cha women, stultified, huddled into a cowering knot, looked at her speechlessly, their red faces several shades paler than their accustomed brick-color. The one whose tray Mrs. Lorriquer now approached shrank back from her. I do not wonder, after the blast which this gentle-looking little American lady had but now let loose upon them all. The market seemed unusually quiet. I glanced about. Every eye was upon us. Fortunately, the market-place was almost empty of customers.

"I'll take two dozen of these," said Mrs. Lorriquer. "How much are they, please?"

The woman counted out the tomatoes with hands trembling, placed them carefully in a paper bag, handed them to

Mrs. Lorriquer, who paid her. We stepped down to the ground from the elevated concrete floor of the market.

"They seem so subdued—the poor souls!" remarked Mrs. Lorriquer, whose goggle-eyed chauffeur, a boy as black as ebony, glanced at her out of the corner of a fearfully rolled eye as he opened the door of her car.

"Come to luncheon," said Mrs. Lorriquer, sweetly, beaming at me, "and help us eat these nice little tomatoes. They are delicious with mayonnaise after they are blanched and chilled." It seemed rather an abrupt contrast, these homely words of invitation, after what I had heard her call those Cha-Cha women. . . .

"I'll come, with pleasure," I replied.

"One o'clock, then," said Mrs. Lorriquer, nodding and smiling, as her Black Hans turned the car skilfully and started along the Queen's Road toward the center of town.

WE DID not play cards that afternoon after luncheon, because Mrs. Lorriquer and Mrs. Preston were going to an afternoon party at the residence of the Government Secretary's wife, and Colonel Lorriquer and I sat, over our coffee, on the west gallery of the house out of reach of the blazing early-afternoon sun, and chatted.

We got upon the subject of the possibility of another isthmian canal, the one tentatively proposed across Nicaragua.

"That, as you may know, Mr. Canevin, was one of the old French Company's proposals, before they settled down to approximately the present site—the one we followed out—back in the late Seventies."

"De Lesseps," I murmured.

"Yes," said the Colonel, musingly, "yes—a very complex matter it was, that French proposal. They never could, it seems, have gone through with it, as a matter of fact—the opposition at home in France, the underestimate of the gross cost of excavation, the suspicion of 'crookedness' which arose—they impeached the Count de Lesseps finally, you know, degraded him, ruined the poor fellow. And then, the sanitation question, you know. If it had not been for our Gorgas and his marvelous work in that direction——"

"Tell me," I interrupted, "just how long were the French at work on their canal, Colonel?"

"Approximately from 1881 to 1889," replied the Colonel, "although the actual work of excavation, the bulk of the work, was between '85 and '89. By the way, Canevin, we lived in a rather unusual house there. Have I ever mentioned that to you?"

"Never," said I. "What was the unusual element about your house?"

"Only that it was believed to be haunted," replied the Colonel; "although, I must admit, I never—we never—met with the least evidence outside the superstitions of the people. Our neighbors all believed it to be haunted in some way. We got it for a song for that reason and it was a very pleasant place. You see, it had been fitted up, quite regardless of the cost, as a kind of public casino or gambling-house, about 1885, and it had been a resort for de Lesseps' crowd for the four years before the French Company abandoned their work. It was a huge place, with delightful galleries. The furniture, too, was excellent. We took it as it stood, you see, and, beyond a terrific job to get it clean and habitable, it was a very excellent investment. We were there for more than three years altogether."

An idea, vague, tenuous, grotesque enough in all truth, and, indeed, somewhat less than half formed, had leaped into my mind at the combination of a "haunted" residence and the French work

on the ill-fated de Lesseps canal project.

"Indeed!" said I. "It certainly sounds interesting. And do you know, Colonel, who ran the old casino; who, so to speak, was the proprietor—unless it was a part of the Company's scheme for keeping their men interested?"

"It was privately managed," returned the Colonel, "and, queerly enough, as it happens, I can show you the photograph of the former proprietor. He was a picturesque villain!" The Colonel rose and started to go inside the house from where we sat on the cool gallery. He paused at the wide doorway, his hand on the jamb.

"It was the proprietor who was supposed to haunt the house," said he, and went inside.

My mind reeled under the stress of these clues and the attempts, almost subconscious—for, indeed, I had thought much of the possible problem presented by Mrs. Lorriquer's case; a "case" only in my own imagination, so far; and I had constructed tentatively three or four connected theories by the time the Colonel returned, a large, stiff, cabinet photograph in his hand. He laid this on the table between us and resumed his Chinese rattan lounge-chair. I picked up the photograph.

It was the portrait, stiffly posed, the hand, senatorially, in the fold of the long, black *surtout* coat, of the sort anciently known as a Prince Albert, of a rather small, emaciated man, whose face was disfigured by the pittings of smallpox; a man with a heavy head of jet-black hair, carefully combed after a fashion named, in our United States, for General McClellan of Civil War fame, the locks brushed forward over the tops of the ears, and the parting, although this could not be seen in the front-face photograph, extending all the way down the back to the neck. A "croupier's" mustache, curled and waxed ferociously, ornamented the sallow, sinister features of a face notable only for its one outstanding feature; a jaw as solid and square as that of Julius Cæsar. Otherwise, as far as character was concerned, the photograph showed a very unattractive person, the type of man, quite obviously, who in these modern times would inevitably have followed one of our numerous and varied "rackets" and probably, one imagined, with that jaw to help, successfully!

"And how, if one may ask," said I, laying the photograph down on the table again, "did you manage to get hold of this jewel, Colonel Lorriquer?"

The old gentleman laughed. "We found it in the back end of a bureau drawer," said he. "I have mentioned that we took the house over just as it was. Did you notice the cameo?"

"Yes," I replied, picking the photograph up once more to look at the huge breast-pin which seemed too large in the picture even for the enormous "de Joinville" scarf which wholly obliterated the shirt-front underneath.

"It is certainly a whopper!" I commented. "It reminds me of that delightful moving picture *Cameo Kirby*, if you happened to see it some time ago, on the silent screen."

"Quite," agreed Colonel Lorriquer. "That, too, turned up, and in the same ancient bureau, when we were cleaning it. It was wedged in behind the edge of the bottom-board of the middle drawer. Of course you have observed that Mrs. Lorriquer wears it?"

I had, and said so. The enormous breast-pin was the same which I had many times observed upon Mrs. Lorriquer. It seemed a favorite ornament of hers. I picked up the photograph once more.

Down in the lower right-hand corner, in now faded gilt letters of ornamental scrollwork, appeared the name of the

photographer. I read: "La Palma, Quezaltenango."

" 'Quezaltenango,' I read aloud. "That is in Guatemala. Was the 'gentleman of the house', perhaps, a Central American? It would be hard to guess at his nationality from this. He looks a citizen of the world!"

"No," replied the Colonel, "he was a Frenchman, and he had been, as it appears, living by his wits all over Central America. When the work of construction actually began under the French Company—that was in 1885—there was a rush of persons like him toward the pickings from so large a group of men who would be looking for amusement, and this fellow came early and stayed almost throughout the four years. His name was Simon Legrand, and, from what I gathered about him, he was a very ugly customer."

"You remarked that he was connected with the alleged haunting," I ventured. "Is there, perhaps, a story in that?"

"Hardly a story, Mr. Canevin. No. It was merely that toward the end of the French Company's activities, in 1889, Legrand, who had apparently antagonized all his patrons at his casino, got into a dispute with one of them, over a game of *piquet* or *écarté*—one of those French games of some kind, perhaps even *vingt-et-un,* for all I know, or even *chemin-de-fer*—and Simon went up to his bedroom, according to the story, to secure a pistol, being, for the time, rather carelessly in that company, unarmed. His 'guest' followed him upstairs and shot him as he stood in front of the bureau where he kept his weapon, from the bedroom doorway, thus ending the career of what must have been a very precious rascal. Thereafter, the French Company's affairs and that of the casino being abruptly dissolved at about the same time, the rumor arose that Legrand was haunting his old quarters. Beyond the rumor, there never seemed anything to suggest its basis in anything but the imagination of the native Panamanians. As I have mentioned, we lived in the house three years, and it was precisely like any other house, only rather cheap, which satisfied us very well!"

THAT, as a few cautious questions, put diplomatically, clearly showed, was all the Colonel knew about Simon Legrand and his casino. I used up all the questions I had in mind, one after another, and, it being past three in the afternoon, and overtime for the day's *siesta,* I was about to take my leave in search of forty winks and the afternoon's shower-bath, when the Colonel volunteered a singular piece of information. He had been sitting rather quietly, as though brooding, and it was this, which I attributed to the after-luncheon drowsiness germane to these latitudes, which had prompted me to go. I was, indeed, rising from my chair at the moment, when the Colonel remarked:

"One element of the old casino seemed to remain—perhaps that was the haunting!" He stopped, and I hung, poised, as it were, to catch what he might be about to say. He paused, however, and I prompted him.

"And what might that be, sir?" I asked, very quietly. The Colonel seemed to come out of his revery.

"Eh?" he said, "eh, what?" He looked at me rather blankly.

"You were remarking that one element of the old casino's influence seemed to remain in your Canal Zone residence," said I.

"Ah—yes. Why, it was strange, Mr. Canevin, distinctly strange. I have often thought about it; although, of course, it was the merest coincidence, unless—perhaps—well, the idea of *suggestion* might

come into play. Er—ah—er, what I had in mind was that—er—Mrs. Lorriquer you know—she began to take up card-playing there. She had never, to my knowledge, played before; had never cared for cards in the least; been brought up, in early life, to regard them as not quite the thing for a lady and all that, you see. Her mother, by the way, was Sarah Langhorne—perhaps you had not heard this, Mr. Canevin—the very well-known medium of Bellows Falls, Vermont. The old lady had quite a reputation in her day. Strictly honest, of course! Old New England stock—of the very best, sir. Straight-laced! Lord—a card in the house would have been impossible! Cards, in that family! 'The Devil's Bible,' Mr. Canevin. That was the moral atmosphere which surrounded my wife's formative days. But—no sooner had we begun to live in that house down there, than she developed 'card-sense', somehow, and she has found it—er—her chief interest, I should say, ever since." The old Colonel heaved a kind of mild sigh, and that was as near as I had heard to any comment on his wife's outrageous conduct at cards, which must, of course, have been a major annoyance in the old gentleman's otherwise placid existence.

I WENT home with much material to ponder. I had enough to work out a more or less complete "case" now, if, indeed, there was an occult background for Mrs. Lorriquer's diverse conduct, her apparently subconscious use of colloquial French, and—that amazing deep bass voice!

Yes, all the elements seemed to be present now. The haunted house, with that scar-faced croupier as the haunter; the sudden predilection for cards emanating there; the initial probability of Mrs. Lorriquer's susceptibility to discarnate influences, to a "control", as the spiritualists name this phenomenon—the cameo—all the rest of it; it all pointed straight to one conclusion, which, to put it conservatively, might be described as the "influence" of the late Simon Legrand's personality upon kindly Mrs. Lorriquer who had "absorbed" it in three years' residence in a house thoroughly impregnated by his ugly and unpleasant personality.

I let it go at that, and—it must be understood—I was only half-way in earnest at the time, in even attempting to attribute to this "case" anything like an occult background. One gets to look for such explanations when one lives in the West Indies where the very atmosphere is charged with Magic!

But—my inferences, and whereunto these led, were, at their most extreme, mild, compared with what was, within two days, to be revealed to us all. However, I have resolved to set this tale down in order, as it happened, and again I remind myself that I must not allow myself to run ahead of the normal sequence of events. The *dénouement*, however, did not take very long to occur.

It was, indeed, no more than two days later; at the unpropitious hour of two-fifteen in the morning—I looked at my watch on my bureau as I was hastily throwing on a few necessary clothes—that I was aroused by a confused kind of tumult outside, and, coming into complete wakefulness, observed an ominous glow through my windows and realized that a house, quite near by, was on fire.

I leaped at once out of bed, and took a better look, with my head out the window. Yes, it was a fire, and, from appearances, the makings of a fine—and very dangerous—blaze here in the heart of the residence district where the houses, on the sharp side-hill, are built very close together.

It was a matter of moments before I

was dressed, after a fashion, and outside, and running down the path to my gateway and thence around the corner to the left. The fire itself, as I now saw at a glance, was in a wooden building now used as a garage, directly on the roadway before one of Denmark Hill's ancient and stately mansions. Already a thin crowd, of negroes entirely, had gathered, and I saw that I was "elected" to take charge in the absence of any other white man, when I heard, with relief, the engine approaching. Our Fire Department, while not hampered with obsolete apparatus, is somewhat primitive. The engine rounded the corner, and just behind it, a Government Ford, the "transportation" apportioned to Lieutenant Farnum of Uncle Sam's efficient Marines. The Lieutenant, serving as the Governor's Legal Aide, had, among his fixed duties, the charge of the Fire Department. This highly efficient young gentleman, whom I knew very well, was at once in the very heart of the situation, had the crowd back away to a reasonable distance, the fire engine strategically placed, and a double stream of chemicals playing directly upon the blazing shack.

The fire, however, had had a long start, and the little building was in a full blaze. It seemed, just then, doubtful whether or not the two streams would prove adequate to put it out. The real danger, however, under the night trade wind, which was blowing lustily, was in the spread of the fire, through flying sparks, of which there were many, and I approached Lieutenant Farnum offering cooperation.

"I'd suggest waking up the people—in that house, and that, and that one," directed Lieutenant Farnum, denoting which houses he had in mind.

"Right!" said I, "I'm shoving right off!" And I started down the hill to the first of the houses. On the way I was fortunate enough to meet my house-boy, Stephen Penn, an intelligent young negro, and him I dispatched to two of the houses which stood together, to awaken the inmates if, indeed, the noise of the conflagration had not already performed that office. Then I hastened at a run to the Criqué place, occupied by the Lorriquer family, the house farthest from the blaze, yet in the direct line of the sparks and blazing slivers which the trade wind carried in a thin aerial stream straight toward it.

Our servants, in West Indian communities, never remain for the night on the premises. The Lorriquérs would be, like all other Caucasians, alone in their house. I had, as it happened, never been upstairs in the house; did not, therefore, have any idea of its layout, nor knew which of the bedrooms were occupied by the several members of the family.

Without stopping to knock at the front entrance door, I slipped the latch of a pair of jalousies leading into the "hall" or drawing-room, an easy matter to negotiate, stepped inside across the window-sill, and, switching on the electric light in the lower entranceway, ran up the broad stone staircase to the floor above. I hoped that chance would favor me in finding the Colonel's room first, but as there was no way of telling, I rapped on the first door I came to, and, turning the handle—this was an emergency—stepped inside, leaving the door open behind me to secure such light as came from the single bulb burning in the upper hallway.

I stepped inside. . . .

AGAIN, pausing for an instant to record my own sensations as an integral portion of this narrative, I hesitate, but this time only because of the choices which lie before me in telling, now long afterward, with the full knowledge of what was involved in this strange

case, precisely what I saw; precisely what seemed to blast my eyesight for its very incredibleness—its "impossibility".

I had, it transpired, hit upon Mrs. Lorriquer's bedroom, and there plain before me—it was a light, clear night, and all the eight windows stood open to the starlight and what was left of a waning moon—lay Mrs. Lorriquer on the stub-posted mahogany four-poster with its tester and valance. The mosquito-net was not let down, and Mrs. Lorriquer, like most people in our climate, was covered, as she lay in her bed, only with a sheet. I could, therefore, see her quite plainly, in an excellent light.

But—that was not all that I saw.

For, beside the bed, quite close in fact, stood—Simon Legrand—facing me, the clothes, the closely buttoned *surtout*, the spreading, flaring *de Joinville* scarf, fastened with the amazing brooch, the pock-marked, ill-natured face, the thick, black hair, the typical *croupier* mustache, the truculent expression; Simon Legrand, to the last detail, precisely as he appeared in the cabinet photograph of La Palma of Quezaltenango—Simon Legrand to the life.

And, between him as he stood there, glaring truculently at me, intruding upon his abominable manifestation, and the body of Mrs. Lorriquer, as I glared back at this incredible configuration, there stretched, and wavered, and seemed to flow, *toward* him and *from* the body of Mrs. Lorriquer, a whitish, tenuous stream of some milky-looking material—like a waved sheet, like a great mass of opaque soap-bubbles, like those pouring grains of attenuated *plasma* described in *Dracula;* when in the dreadful castle in Transylvania, John Harker stood confronted with the materialization of that arch-fiend's myrmidons.

All these comparisons rushed through my mind, and, finally, the well-remembered descriptions of what takes place in the "materialization" of a "control" at a mediumistic *séance* when material from the medium floats toward and *into* the growing incorporation of the manifestation, building up the non-fictitious body through which the control expresses itself.

All this, I say, rushed through my mind with the speed of thought, and recorded itself so that I can easily remember the sequence of these ideas. But, confronted with this utterly unexpected affair, what I did, in actuality, was to pause, transfixed with the strangeness, and to mutter, "My God!"

Then, shaking internally, pulling myself together by a mighty effort while the shade or manifestation or whatever it might prove to be, of the French gambler glowered at me murderously, in silence, I made a great effort, one of those efforts which a man makes under the stress of utter necessity. I addressed the figure—in French!

"Good-morning, Monsieur Legrand," said I, trying to keep the quaver out of my voice. "Is it too early, think you, for a little game of *écarté?*"

Just how, or why, this sentence formed itself in my mind, or, indeed, managed to get itself uttered, is, to this day, a puzzle to me. It seemed just then the one appropriate, the inevitable way, to deal with the situation. Then——

In the same booming bass which had voiced Mrs. Lorriquer's *"Sapristi"*, a voice startlingly in contrast with his rather diminutive figure, Simon Legrand replied:

"Oui, Monsieur, at your service on all occasions, day or night—you to select the game!"

"Eh bien, donc——" I began, when there came an interruption in the form of a determined masculine voice just behind me.

"Put your hands straight up and keep them there!"

I turned, and looked straight into the mouth of Colonel Lorriquer's service revolver; behind it the old Colonel, his face stern, his steady grip on the pistol professional, uncompromising.

At once he lowered the weapon.

"What—Mr. Canevin!" he cried. "What——"

"Look!" I cried back at him, "look, while it lasts, Colonel!" and, grasping the old man's arm, I directed his attention to the now rapidly fading form or simulacrum of Simon Legrand. The Colonel stared fixedly at this amazing sight.

"My God!" He repeated my own exclamation. Then—"It's Legrand, Simon Legrand, the gambler!"

I explained, hastily, disjointedly, about the fire. I wanted the Colonel to understand, first, what I was doing in his house at half-past two in the morning. That, at the moment, seemed pressingly important to me. I had hardly begun upon this fragmentary explanation when Mrs. Preston appeared at the doorway of her mother's room.

"Why, it's Mr. Canevin!" she exclaimed. Then, proceeding, "There's a house on fire quite near by, Father—I thought I'd best awaken you and Mother." Then, seeing that, apart from my mumbling of explanations about the fire, both her father and I were standing, our eyes rivetted to a point near her mother's bed, she fell silent, and not unnaturally, looked in the same direction. We heard her, behind us, her voice now infiltrated with a sudden alarm:

"What it it?—*what is it?* Oh, Father, I thought I saw——"

The voice trailed out into a whisper. We turned, simultaneously, thus missing the very last thin waning appearance of Simon Legrand as the stream of tenuous, wavering substance poured back from him to the silent, immobile body of Mrs. Lorriquer motionless on its great bed, and the Colonel was just in time to support his daughter as she collapsed in a dead faint.

All this happened so rapidly that it is out of the question to set it down so as to give a mental picture of the swift sequence of events.

The Colonel, despite his character and firmness, was an old man, and not physically strong. I therefore lifted Mrs. Preston and carried her to a day-bed which stood along the wall of the room and there laid her down. The Colonel rubbed her hands. I fetched water from the mahogany washstand such as is part of the furnishings of all these old West Indian residence bedrooms, and sprinkled a little of the cool water on her face. Within a minute or two her eyelids fluttered, and she awakened. This secondary emergency had naturally diverted our attention from what was toward at Mrs. Lorriquer's bedside. But now, leaving Mrs. Preston who was nearly herself again, we hastened over to the bed.

Mrs. Lorriquer, apparently in a very deep sleep, and breathing heavily, lay there, inert. The Colonel shook her by the shoulder; shook her again. Her head moved to one side, her eyes opened, a baleful glare in her eyes.

"Va t'en, sâle bête!" said a deep manlike voice from between her clenched teeth. Then, a look of recognition replacing the glare, she sat up abruptly, and, in her natural voice, addressing the Colonel whom she had but now objurgated as a "foul beast," she asked, anxiously:

"Is anything the matter, dearest? Why—Mr. Canevin—I hope nothing's wrong!"

I told her about the fire.

In the meantime Mrs. Preston, somewhat shaky, but brave though puzzled over the strange happenings which she

had witnessed, came to her mother's bedside. The Colonel placed an arm about his daughter, steadying her.

"Then we'd better all get dressed," said Mrs. Lorriquer, when I had finished my brief account of the fire, and the Colonel and I and Mrs. Preston walked out of the bedroom. Mrs. Preston slipped into her own room and closed the door behind her.

"Get yourself dressed, sir," I suggested to the old Colonel, "and I will wait for you on the front gallery below." He nodded, retired to his room, and I slipped downstairs and out to the gallery, where I sank into a cane chair and lit a cigarette with shaking fingers.

THE Colonel joined me before the cigarette was smoked through. He went straight to the point.

"For God's sake, what is it, Canevin?" he inquired, helplessly.

I had had time to think during the consumption of that cigarette on the gallery. I had expected some such direct inquiry as this, and had my answer ready.

"There is no danger—nothing whatever to worry yourself about just now, at any rate," said I, with a positive finality which I was far from feeling internally. I was still shaken by what I had seen in that airy bedroom. "The ladies will be down shortly. We can not talk before them. Besides, the fire may, possibly, be dangerous. I will tell you everything I know tomorrow morning. Come to my house at nine, if you please, sir."

The old Colonel showed his army training at this.

"Very well, Mr. Canevin," said he, "at nine tomorrow, at your house."

Lieutenant Farnum and his efficient direction proved too much for the fire. Within a half-hour or so, as we sat on the gallery, the ladies wearing shawls because of the cool breeze, my house-boy, Stephen, came to report to me that the fire was totally extinguished. We had seen none of its original glare for the past quarter of an hour. I said good-night, and the Lorriquer family retired to make up its interrupted sleep, while I walked up the hill and around the corner to my own house and turned in. The only persons among us all who had not been disturbed that eventful night were Mrs. Preston's two small children. As it would be a simple matter to take them to safety in case the fire menaced the house, we had agreed to leave them as they were, and they had slept quietly throughout all our alarums and excursions!

THE old Colonel looked his full seventy years the next morning when he arrived at my house and was shown out upon the gallery by Stephen, where I awaited him. His face was strained, lined, and ghastly.

"I did not sleep at all the rest of the night, Mr. Canevin," he confessed, "and four or five times I went to my wife's room and looked in, but every time she was sleeping naturally. What do you make of this dreadful happening, sir? I really do not know which way to turn, I admit to you, sir." The poor old man was in a truly pathetic state. I did what I could to reassure him.

I set out before him the whole case, as I have already set it out, as the details came before me, throughout the course of this narrative. I went into all the details, sparing nothing, even the delicate matter of Mrs. Lorriquer's conduct over the card-table. Summing up the matter I said:

"It seems plain, from all this testimony, that Simon Legrand's haunting of his old house which you occupied for three years was more of an actuality than your residence there indicated to you. His sudden death at the hands of one of his 'guests'

may very well have left his personality, perhaps fortified by some unfulfilled wish, about the premises which had been his for a number of years previously. There are many recorded cases of similar nature in the annals of scientific occult investigation. Such a 'shade', animated by some compelling motive to persist in its earthly existence, would 'pervade' such premises already *en rapport* with his ways and customs.

"Then, for the first time, the old house was refurbished and occupied when you moved into it. Mrs. Lorriquer may be, doubtless is, I should suppose from the evidence we already have, one of those persons who is open to what seems to have happened to her. You mentioned her mother, a well-known medium of years ago. Such qualifications may well be more or less hereditary, you see.

"That Legrand laid hold upon the opportunity to manifiest himself *through her,* we already know. Both of us have seen him, 'manifested' and in a manner exactly typical of mediumistic productions, in material form, of their 'controls'. In this case, the degree of 'control' must be very strong, and, besides that, it has, plainly, been growing. The use of French, unconsciously, the very tone of his deep bass voice, also unconscious on her part, and—I will go farther, Colonel; there is another, and a very salient clue for us to use. You spoke of the fact that previous to your occupancy of the Legrand house in the 'zone' Mrs. Lorriquer never played cards. Obviously, if the rest of my inferences are correct, this desire to play cards came direct from Legrand, who was using her for his own self-expression, having, in some way, got himself *en rapport* with her as her 'control'. I would go on, then, and hazard the guess that just as her use of French is plainly subconscious, as is the use of Legrand's voice, on occasion—you will remember, I spoke to him before you came into the room last night, *and he answered me in that same deep voice*—so her actual playing of cards is an act totally unconscious on her part, or nearly so. It is a wide sweep of the imagination, but, I think, it will be substantiated after we have released her from this obsession, occupation by another personality, or whatever it proves to be."

The word "release" seemed to electrify the old gentleman. He jumped out of his chair, came toward me, his lined face alight with hope.

'Is there any remedy, Mr. Canevin? Can it be possible? Tell me, for God's sake, you can not understand how I am suffering—my poor wife! You have had much experience with this sort of thing; I, none whatever. It has always seemed —well, to put it bluntly, a lot of 'fake' to me."

"Yes," said I, slowly, "there is a remedy, Colonel—two remedies, in fact. The phenomenon with which we are confronted seems a kind of combination of mediumistic projection of the 'control', and plain, old-fashioned 'possession'. The Bible, as you will recall, is full of such cases—the Gadarene Demoniac, for example. So, indeed, is the ecclesiastical history through the Middle Ages. Indeed, as you may be aware, the 'order' of exorcist still persists in at least one of the great historic churches. One remedy, then, is exorcism. It is unusual, these days, but I am myself familiar with two cases where it has been successfully performed, in Boston, Massachusetts, within the last decade. A salient point, if we should resort to that, however, is Mrs. Lorriquer's own religion. Exorcism can not, according to the rules, be accorded to everybody. The bare minimum is that the subject should be validly baptized. Otherwise exorcism is inoperative; it does

not work as we understand its mystical or spiritual processes."

"Mrs. Lorriquer's family were all Friends—Quakers," said the Colonel. "She is not, to my knowledge, baptized. Her kind of Quakers do not, I believe, practise baptism,"

"Well, then," said I, "there is another way, and that, with your permission, Colonel, I will outline to you."

"I am prepared to do anything, anything whatever, Mr. Canevin, to cure this horrible thing for my poor wife. The matter I leave entirely in your hands, and I will co-operate in every way, precisely as you say."

"Well said, sir!" I exclaimed, and forthwith proceeded to outline my plan to the Colonel. . . .

PERHAPS there are some who would accuse me of being superstitious. As to that I do not know, and, quite frankly, I care little. However, I record that that afternoon I called on the rector of my own church in St. Thomas, the English Church, as the native people still call it, although it is no longer, now that St. Thomas is American territory, under the control of the Archbishop of the British West Indies as it was before our purchase from Denmark in 1917. I found the rector at home and proffered my request. It was for a vial of holy water. The rector and I walked across the street to the church and there in the sacristy, without comment, the good gentleman, an other-worldly soul much beloved by his congregation, provided my need. I handed him a twenty-franc note, for his poor, and took my departure, the bottle in the pocket of my white drill coat.

That evening, by arrangement with the Colonel, we gathered for an evening of cards at the Lorriquers'. I have never seen Mrs. Lorriquer more typically the termagant. She performed all her bag of tricks, such as I have recorded, and, shortly after eleven, when we had finished, Mrs. Preston's face wore a dull flush of annoyance and, when she retired, which she did immediately after we had calculated the final score, she hardly bade the rest of us good-night.

Toward the end of the play, once more I happened to hold a commanding hand, and played it out to a successful five no-trumps, bid and made. All through the process of playing that hand, adverse to Mrs. Lorriquer and her partner, I listened carefully to a monotonous, ill-natured kind of undertone chant with which she punctuated her obvious annoyance. What she was saying was:

"Nom de nom, de nom, de nom, de nom——" precisely as a testy, old-fashioned, grumbling Frenchman will repeat those nearly meaningless syllables.

Mrs. Lorriquer retired not long after her daughter's departure upstairs, leaving the Colonel and me over a pair of Havana cigars.

WE WAITED, according to our prearranged plan, downstairs there, until one o'clock in the morning.

Then the Colonel, at my request, brought from the small room which he used as an office or den, the longer of a very beautiful pair of Samurai swords, a magnificent weapon, with a blade as keen and smooth as any razor. Upon this, with a clean handkerchief, I rubbed half the contents of my holy water, not only upon the shimmering, inlaid, beautiful blade, but over the hand-grip as well.

Shortly after one, we proceeded, very softly, upstairs, and straight to the door of Mrs. Lorriquer's room, where we took up our stand outside. We listened, and within there was no sound of any kind whatever.

From time to time the Colonel, stooping, would peer in through the large

keyhole, designed for an enormous, old-fashioned, complicated key. After quite a long wait, at precisely twenty minutes before two a. m. the Colonel, straightening up again after such an inspection, nodded to me. His face, which had regained some of its wonted color during the day, was a ghastly white, quite suddenly, and his hands shook as he softly turned the handle of the door, opened it, and stood aside for me to enter, which I did, he following me, and closing the door behind him. Behind us, in the upper hallway, and just beside the door-jamb, we had left a large, strong wicker basket, the kind designed to hold a family washing.

Precisely as she had lain the night before, was Mrs. Lorriquer, on the huge four-poster. And, beside her, the stream of *plasma* flowing from her to him, stood Simon Legrand, glowering at us evilly.

I advanced straight upon him, the beautiful knightly sword of Old Japan firmly held in my right hand, and as he shrank back, stretching the *plasma* stream to an extreme tenuity—like pulled dough it seemed—I abruptly cut through this softly-flowing material directly above the body of Mrs. Lorriquer with a transverse stroke. The sword met no apparent resistance as I did so, and then, without any delay, I turned directly upon Legrand, now muttering in a deep bass snarl, and with an accurately timed swing of the weapon, sheared off his head. At this stroke, the sword met resistance, comparable, perhaps, as nearly as I can express it, to the resistance which might be offered by the neck of a snow-man built by children.

The head, bloodlessly, as I had anticipated, fell to the floor, landing with only a slight, *soft* sound, rolled a few feet, and came to a pause against the baseboard of the room. The decapitated body swayed and buckled toward my right, and, before it gave way completely and fell prone upon the bedroom floor, I had managed two more strokes, the first through the middle of the body, and the second a little above the knees.

Then, as these large fragments lay upon the floor, I chopped them, lightly, into smaller sections.

As I made the first stroke, that just above Mrs. Lorriquer, severing the *plasma* stream, I heard from her a long, deep sound, like a sigh. Thereafter she lay quiet. There was no motion whatever from the sundered sections of "Simon Legrand" as these lay, quite inert, upon the floor, and, as I have indicated, no flow of blood from them. I turned to the Colonel, who stood just at my shoulder witnessing this extraordinary spectacle.

"It worked out precisely as we anticipated," said I. "The horrible thing is over and done with, now. It is time for the next step."

The old Colonel nodded, and went to the door, which he opened, and through which he peered before stepping out into the hallway. Plainly we had made no noise. Mrs. Preston and her babies were asleep. The Colonel brought the clothes-basket into the room, and between us, and rather gingerly at first, we picked up the sections of what had been "Simon Legrand". They were surprizingly light, and, to the touch, felt somewhat like soft and pliant dough. Into the basket they went, all of them, and, carrying it between us—it seemed to weigh altogether no more than perhaps twenty pounds at the outside—we stepped softly out of the room, closing the door behind us, down the stairs, and out, through the dining-room and kitchen into the walled back-yard.

Here, in the corner, stood the wire apparatus wherein papers and light trash were burned daily. Into this, already half filled with various papers, the Colonel

poured several quarts of kerosene from a large five-gallon container fetched from the kitchen, and upon this kindling we placed carefully the strange fragments from our clothes-basket. Then I set a match to it, and within ten minutes there remained nothing except small particles of unidentifiable trash, of the simulacrum of Simon Legrand.

We returned, softly, after putting back the kerosene and the clothes-basket where they belonged, into the house, closing the kitchen door after us. Again we mounted the stairs, and went into Mrs. Lorriquer's room. We walked over to the bed and looked at her. She seemed, somehow, shrunken, thinner than usual, less bulky, but, although there were deep, unaccustomed lines showing in her relaxed face, there was, too, upon that face, the very ghost of a kindly smile.

"It is just as you said it would be, Mr. Canevin," whispered the Colonel as we tiptoed down the stone stairway. I nodded.

"We will need an oiled rag for the sword," said I. "I wet it very thoroughly, you know."

"I will attend to that," said the Colonel, as he gripped my hand in a grasp of surprizing vigor.

"Good-night, sir," said I, and he accompanied me to the door.

THE Colonel came in to see me about ten the next morning. I had only just finished a late "tea", as the early morning meal, after the Continental fashion, is still named in the Virgin Islands. The Colonel joined me at the table and took a late cup of coffee.

"I was sitting beside her when she awakened, a little before nine," he said, "and as she complained of an 'all-gone' feeling, I persuaded her to remain in bed, 'for a couple of days.' She was sleeping just now, very quietly and naturally, when I ran over to report."

I called the following morning to inquire for Mrs. Lorriquer. She was still in bed, and I left a polite message of good-will.

It was a full week before she felt well enough to get up, and it was two days after that that the Lorriquers invited me to dinner once more. The bulletins, surreptitiously reported to me by the Colonel, indicated that, as we had anticipated, she was slowly gaining strength. One of the Navy physicians, called in, had prescribed a mild tonic, which she had been taking.

The shrunken appearance persisted, I observed, but this, considering Mrs. Lorriquer's characteristic stoutness, was, actually, an improvement at least in her general appearance. The lines of her face appeared somewhat accentuated as compared to how she had looked before the last "manifestation" of the "control". Mrs. Preston seemed worried about her mother, but said little. She was rather unusually silent during dinner, I noticed.

I had one final test which I was anxious to apply. I waited for a complete pause in our conversation toward the end of a delightful dinner, served in Mrs. Lorriquer's best manner.

"And shall we have some Contract after dinner this evening?" I inquired, addressing Mrs. Lorriquer.

She almost blushed, looked at me deprecatingly.

"But, Mr. Canevin, you know—I know nothing of cards," she replied.

"Why, Mother!" exclaimed Mrs. Preston from across the table, and Mrs. Lorriquer looked at her in what seemed to be evident puzzlement. Mrs. Preston did not proceed, I suspect because her father touched her foot for silence under the

table. Indeed, questioned, he admitted as much to me later that evening.

The old gentleman walked out with me, and half-way up the hall when I took my departure a little before eleven, after an evening of conversation punctuated by one statement of Mrs. Lorriquer's, made with a pleasant smile through a somewhat rueful face.

"Do you know, I've actually lost eighteen pounds, Mr. Canevin, and that being laid up in bed only eight or nine days. It seems incredible, does it not? The climate, perhaps——"

"Those scales *must* have been quite off," vouchsafed Mrs. Preston.

Going up the hill with the Colonel, I remarked:

"You still have one job on your hands, Colonel."

"Wh—what is that, Mr. Canevin?" inquired the old gentleman, apprehensively.

"Explaining the whole thing to your daughter," said I.

"I daresay it can be managed," returned Colonel Lorriquer. "I'll have a hack at that later!"

Madman's Song

By MARY ELIZABETH COUNSELMAN

Come dance for me, O midnight wraith
  With hollow eye and horrid grin!
The waning moon is white above;
The circling bats replace the dove . . .
  About your dancing, then!

The leaning tombstones dully gleam—
  One sodded mound a-sudden stirs
Where bony fingers claw within!
About your ghoul's mazurka, then!
  The church cat stares and purrs.

A night thing rustles in the leaves;
  A winging screech owl cries and veers . . .
Dance, ghost! Begin your frenzied prance!
The music for your eery dance
  Sobs softly in my ears!

The Vrykolakas

By ROBERT C. SANDISON

A thrilling tale of a gangster in a Western city—a vampire story of unusual power

THE yellow taxi, with drawn curtains, had made its third circuit of the block. Each time on swinging into Chestnut Avenue, it had slowed down and idled along at a bare ten miles an hour. This third trip is stopped completely, gliding slowly to the curb.

It was a very ordinary-looking taxi, its driver being its only distinguishing feature. The winter weather was warm, but he sat huddled in a high-collared overcoat, and the brim of his hat was tipped over his eyes.

As the car halted, he looked swiftly up and down the street, and spoke over his shoulder to the curtained rear of the car.

" 'S all right. Nobody but that goofy bird on the corner."

"Well done, Spick." The voice, a curious icy quality about it, came from the shadowy rear seat. "Keep your motor running."

"Say, Jinx," a second voice spoke, "that bird's been there every time we passed." A thin hand cautiously parted the curtains and a pasty-white face peered furtively out.

On the corner, close to the parked taxi, a man was standing, hidden, like the taxi-driver, in what seemed to be a long black overcoat. Some sort of cloth, like a muffler, effectively concealed most of his face, although no hat covered his lank, black hair. He stood as motionless as an image, not a muscle moving. There was something uncanny about his very immobility.

"I don't like it, Jinx," said the pasty-faced man. "I'll bet he's a bull—mebbe they got tipped off——"

"Suppose he is?" said the man called Jinx, in his icy voice. "When the time comes, burn him down! Get a grip on yourself, Dink! I'll take care of friend Kyrie myself."

From the floor of the car he picked up a Thompson sub-machine-gun and casually fingered the mechanism.

The pasty-faced Dink drew back into the car and fumbled in his pocket. He drew out a twisted quill of paper, emptied the whitish powder it contained into the hollow between his closed thumb and forefinger, and sniffed it into his nostrils. A sort of shiver ran through him; he straightened up and grinned at his chief.

Then he whisked a pistol from his pocket and peered again at the motionless figure on the corner.

The driver gave a warning hiss. The door of a house across the street had opened; a gay group of people were pouring forth. There was much shouting and laughter. A dark-haired, dark-skinned young man led a radiant-faced girl. A white-clad child, with a tumbled mop of black curls, ran before them laughing, and scattering the petals from hot-house roses. Very obviously a wedding party.

At the sidewalk the young bridegroom stopped, looked in perplexity and momentary annoyance at the taxi that had parked on the wrong side of the street,

"Two fingers caught the little gold lighter and a pale flame sprang up from the wick. The thing shrank back."

and beckoned to it imperiously. Then he laughed again, caught his wife in his arms and kissed her. Behind them a black-robed priest of the Greek Orthodox Church murmured a smiling benediction.

"Kiss me, too, Kyrie! Kiss me, too!" That was the black-haired little flower-girl. She danced up, holding out her arms to him. The young man laughed and bent toward her.

And from across the street came a staccato rattle.

The bridegroom straightened up, a look of hurt, wondering surprize on his face. He took a step or two toward his bride. The white roses at her breast were spotted with crimson. She swayed.

The staccato crackling broke out again, punctuated with the flat smacks of an automatic pistol.

Somehow he caught the girl who had been his wife these few short minutes. For an instant they stood clasped tightly to each other; then both sank slowly to the red-spotted sidewalk.

The little flower-girl had raised agonized brown eyes to the priest.

"They've hurted me, Papa! They've hurted me!"

And as the bearded priest dropped to his knees beside her, she whispered:

"Is I hurted bad, Papa?"

But when the priest answered, she did not hear.

The humming horses under the hood of the yellow taxi roared into sudden life. But high above their shattering thunder came a high-pitched scream.

"My Gawd! Jinx! I can't kill him—I give him the works—he won't die!"

With a snarl, the icy-voiced Jinx

whirled the machine-gun muzzle about. With the first shots, fleeting seconds past, the motionless figure on the corner had sprung into action. He raced toward the car. Dink's crackling pistol, that hurled bullets through him, never staggered his progress.

He was at the taxi door now. Jinx smashed the glass with the gun muzzle. The car lurched forward, and the rattle of the machine-gun mingled with the beat of the motor. A stream of bullets ripped through the black-clad figure on the running-board.

The door came open in the grasp of a talon-nailed hand. The man hurled himself into the car—he whose life should have been smashed out by that stream of death. The snow-bird Dink gave a babbling scream of unnamable horror—a scream suddenly cut short as hands with ripping nails burrowed into his throat.

His pistol was empty, but he savagely swung it, hammering at the body before him. And, if he could, he would have screamed again at the drum-like noise that sounded under the smashing blows—a sound as from a drum that has been punctured.

Skin—dry, hard skin—he could feel it—stretched taut over unyielding bones. Dry flesh—with holes in it—holes that did not bleed. A musty smell, a moldering smell, of something that never should see the light of day.

Through the roaring in his ears, he heard a splintering crash. The speeding taxi, piloted by a horror-maddened driver, leaped the curb, and smashed at fifty miles an hour into a steel light-post.

The last thing Dink heard on earth was the voice of Jinx Santell, no longer icy, saying, "Oh, God! Oh, God! Oh, God!"

"THEN," said Kip Hollister, of the *Clarion*, "you have no idea who the black-clad man may have been?" He looked questioningly at the stern, set face of Papa Metro, of St. Loukia's Greek Church.

The priest glanced at the blond young Greek who had been introduced to Kip as Angelos Spiridon, and seemed to waver a second. Then he shook his head grimly.

"Whoever he may have been, he must be dead now."

"But he wasn't found at the wreck of the car," persisted Kip. "And for that matter, neither was Santell—though a man seen running from the scene is thought to have been him."

"The other two were dead, I think?"

"Yes. Spick Romero, who was probably driving, had his neck broken in the crash. Dink Malone's throat was—torn out, maybe by a piece of broken glass."

"Maybe," said Papa Metro non-committally.

"No," said Kip with a faint smile, "I don't think so, either. I'd like to find that black-clad man."

The priest arose abruptly, with a swishing of black robes, crossed to the window and stared out into the street, stroking his beard.

"You—you are glad this happened—the wreck?" asked young Spiridon slowly, breaking the silence.

"You bet!" said Kip emphatically. "I'm only sorry Santell wasn't among the casualties! You know," he went on after a moment, "people are beginning to call our town 'the Chicago of the West,' and my newspaper, for one, isn't proud of the title. Anything in our power to stop racketeering, we do."

The blond young Spiridon glanced at the priest, as if seeking assent to something. Abruptly Papa Metro turned away from the window.

"If," he said, "you really wish to find the black-clad man, watch Angelos here. I think he will be the next to die."

"To die?"

"Yes," said Spiridon stoically, "for more than a month I've known I've been put on the spot. I—I hope—they spare Thetis—my wife——"

"Angelos," added the priest, "was Kyrie's ally in fighting the restaurant union."

"Ah! Santell's racket?"

"Yes," said Spiridon. "Jinx Santell made this union, and expected every restaurant owner in town to pay tribute. Those who didn't soon wished they had. Kyrie and I refused; last week the front of Kyrie's restaurant was blown in by a bomb; today—this——"

His voice grew bitter, and his blue eyes began to glow.

"Kyrie was my best friend. He and Eirene and I have played together since we were kids. And then to see them shot down like this—and little Sousou, my sister's baby——"

"We Greeks, we Guinnies and Hunkies," Papa Metro's voice was bitter, "came to this country to escape tyranny, and find ourselves subject to a greater. Is it that no law may touch a gangster?"

"Only the law of another gang," said Kip grimly. "Or this black-clad man, who is apparently proof against machine-gun bullets. Do you know, sir, half a dozen witnesses have sworn he took at least a dozen slugs in his breast, and was still able to open the car door and jump or fall inside? Besides that, he must have been able to either jump from the car before the crash, or walk away from the wreck afterward. Now what manner of human being could do that, sir?"

Again the priest and young Spiridon exchanged glances. The priest slowly nodded, but it was Spiridon who spoke.

"Mr. Hollister, I saw the face of the man in black plainly. I knew it, who have seen it many times. It was Nikola Bouboli!"

Kip started, as a cold chill trickled down his back.

"No!" he protested sharply. "Nick Bouboli died six weeks ago. He was killed——" He stopped then, as the chills once more went down his spine.

"——by Santell's gunmen," finished young Spiridon. "For selling hootch on Santell's territory. Isn't it natural he should want to kill Santell?"

"But—but—hang it, he's dead! I saw his body—they took him for a ride, and riddled him——"

"Though I was born in this country," said Spiridon, "I have heard my father tell of such things back in Greece. Did you ever hear of a *vrykolakas*—in English, a vampire?"

"Like in *Dracula,* you mean? But that's impossible! And anyway, they're night things——"

"No," interrupted Papa Metro. "The *vrykolakes* of the Greek islands differ considerably from the Slavic vampire. They are the dead, but still animated, bodies of wicked men. They have enormous strength, and may not be killed by any ordinary means. Only fire may totally destroy them."

"And," added Spiridon, "Nikola was a bad one, from boyhood up. If you think we lie, Mr. Hollister, then tell me what mortal man could face machine-gun fire at a distance of inches, and live?"

Kip looked out at the bright winter sunshine and shivered.

"In my native island of Santorine," said the priest, "there are many tales of vampires. I do not care to say that they are not true. You spoke of the throat of

one man being ripped out. *Vrykolakes*, Mr. Hollister, are—cannibalistic."

Kip arose rather hastily. He shivered again.

"I—I hope he puts Santell on the spot. Oh gosh, I'm already believing it myself."

"I tell you, I recognized Nick Bouboli!" persisted Spiridon. "And look you, before Nick died, Kyrie and I were slated for a ride. Even as a rival gangster of Santell's, he must have known of it. Wouldn't he naturally watch Kyrie's home and mine for the moment Santell would appear?

"For no one knows where Santell lives—it is said he changes apartments every week. He never goes out without a bodyguard. Do you think," he went on fiercely, "that if I knew where to find him, I'd sit tamely by when my wife is threatened—my best friends murdered? I'd hunt him out and kill him myself." He shrugged helplessly. "But I'm helpless—got to sit still and wait for a bomb—a machine-gun——"

"I can't believe it—about Bouboli," said Kip uncertainly, "but—but I think I'll start going to church again, Father."

The tired lines of Papa Metro's face softened in the hint of a smile.

"The instruments of the Lord are many," he said.

JINX SANTELL had been thrown clear, when the car crashed. Dazed, bleeding from cuts from the shattered glass, he staggered to his feet. He was babbling, muttering insanely, to himself. His fingers plucked aimlessly at his lips.

In those horrible seconds before the car had smashed, he had recognized those black garments of this man who would not die. He wanted to scream at the thought. A black overcoat? Oh, Gawd, no! A shroud—a shroud about which still clung the dank and musty odor of the grave!

And the bullet-riddled, horribly animated thing now bent over Dink Malone's twitching body. There was a ripping, tearing sound; the champ-champ of teeth. Reeling, weak with the horror of it, Santell saw twin streams of blood trickle down from the corners of stiffly moving lips.

Screaming his terror, he turned and ran. Machine-guns, sawed-off shotguns, "pineapples," he knew and understood, and did not fear. But something which no bullet could kill, something which tore and gnawed strips of flesh from dying men, something that smelled of death and the grave—Santell's iron nerve was broken completely.

He ran, and ran, dodging down alleys, racing through back streets, heedless of the stares of the people he met, his only object to put as much space between him and that grisly horror as possible. He had lost all sense of direction; momentarily he expected to hear the pad-pad of unearthly footsteps behind him.

And ever as he ran he heard the wild scream of Spick Romero in the hurtling seconds before he died. "Nick Bouboli!" Spick had screamed. And Santell moaned with terror. Six weeks ago the Greek gangster had gone to his death—it couldn't be he—it couldn't——

At last he stopped from sheer lack of breath. Sobbing and panting for air he leaned against a building, glaring up and down the street. A fully loaded pistol sagged his coat pocket, but its weight brought no comfort. What good was a pistol where a machine-gun had failed?

Slowly he came to realize his whereabouts. There was Dago Joe's speakeasy, and in the rooms above would be men, human men, *his* men. He leaped across

the street, dashed through the bar room, ignoring Dago Joe's startled exclamation, and sprang up the stairs.

Half a dozen pistols appeared as if by magic as he hurled open the door of the room. And as quickly they disappeared, as their owners stared, paralyzed, at the Big Shot.

"Jinx! Well, what the hell——"

"Give me a drink!" said Santell hoarsely. He seized a bottle and poured his own raw sugar moon down his throat. He shuddered, gasped, and drank again.

"Look out the window," he ordered. "A man in black clothes—in—in a——" he wanted to say "shroud" and dared not. Let him once show a sign of "goofiness" and his own killers would turn on him. "In black clothes," he repeated. "Watch for him."

One of the men crossed to the window, his ready pistol appearing in his hand again. Santell laughed croakingly. He staggered to a chair and sat down.

"I—I must've been dreaming," he muttered. "It wasn't Nick—it couldn't have been—I missed—the damn' gun missed——"

His men stared at him curiously. They had never seen the Big Shot drunk before. But for the moment they were silent, waiting for Santell to speak.

And the Big Shot sat, with his face buried in his arms, trying to control his jumping nerves, trying to forget the sight of yellowed teeth that had ripped the throat out of Dink Malone. And perhaps, too, the sight of three bodies that lay in a swath under his machine-gun fire.

"Where's Dink and Spick?" one of the men asked him finally.

Santell raised haunted eyes.

"Dead!" he snarled. "Dead as hell!" He paused. He couldn't tell these wolves of his about the man in the shroud. "Spick wrecked the taxi," he finished more mildly. "Killed him and Dink."

"An' that Guinny you put on the spot?"

"Dead!" Santell jerked to his feet, grasped a bottle and drank again. "Him and his wife and some damn' kid—burned 'em down! I'll show 'em! I'm Jinx Santell—know how I got my name, don't you? I'm a jinx to the other mobs, ain't I? Damn' Guinnies—I'll kill 'em all—Spiridon next——"

He saw the eyes of his wolf-pack, then, saw the look of mounting distrust in them, and grimly he fought for control of himself. He forced a grim laugh, and when he spoke again, it was in his normal icy voice.

"The wreck of the car rather upset me. And that's no joke! Now we'll get down to business. We'll give this Spiridon one more chance to kick in. If he doesn't——"

"Take him for a ride?" suggested somebody.

"No! If he holds out now, it'll mean he's not afraid of the works. K. O.! We'll get his wife—not burn her—just kidnap her, and let him know what'll happen to her if he don't shell out!"

The wolves nodded approvingly. This was more like the cool, resourceful chief they knew.

"Get him on the 'phone, Ritzy," went on Santell, "and put the question to him. The price is now one grand."

A SLIM gangster, whose effeminate face was a startling contrast to his feral eyes, arose and sauntered to the telephone, dialed a number. He spoke briefly, then jerked back from the instrument with an angry oath. He rubbed his ear, as if the second receiver had been unceremoniously slammed down.

"He said, chief," drawled Ritzy, "to tell you to go to hell."

Santell's mouth worked. Did Spiridon know of the shrouded man? Did he know, for instance, that next time the shrouded man would be waiting——?

"All right," said the Big Shot in a curiously flat voice. "Ritzy, you and Mick come with me. If possible, we'll grab the broad this afternoon."

Silently the two men followed him down the stairs into the speakeasy. Dago Joe's littlest girl was playing near the *foot of the stairs. Something bright* about her neck caught Santell's eye. Half-forgotten memories returned to him vaguely. He took a step forward, essayed a smile.

" 'Lo there, Pepita. Now what's this we got here?" With two fingers he almost gingerly touched the little golden cross about the child's neck. "Say, that's a pretty, now, isn't it?"

Pepita's brown eyes regarded him distrustfully.

"Now I wonder how much you'd take for that? See here," and Santell pulled out a roll of bills. "Buy lots of toys, Pepita." He dropped a bill into the child's lap and tried to lift the crucifix from her neck. But her pudgy little hands clung stubbornly to the chain.

And then, before Santell could speak again, Dago Joe's tired-looking little wife appeared and snatched the child from Santell's hands. With what sounded like an Italian malediction, she bore Pepita away.

Dago Joe sidled forward, rubbing his hands nervously. Santell looked about. There was a look of puzzled distrust in the dull, bovine eyes of Mick. A derisive smile sat on Ritzy's girlish face. Santell scowled.

"Let's go," he snapped.

At his ornate uptown apartment, Santell bathed, changed clothes, and attended to the cuts on his face. When he *descended to the street, Ritzy and Mick* were awaiting him in Santell's private car.

It was a silent ride across town. Mick clung stolidly to the steering-wheel without speaking. Ritzy, the usually voluble, sat staring through an aperture in the drawn curtains, and smiled gently, as if at some private joke.

As they neared the Spiridon home, Santell peered nervously about. He *breathed a sigh of relief* when he saw the street was empty. No, not quite. A man stood, apparently absorbed in a newspaper, across the street, but his clothes were normal; he wore no shroud.

"Newspaper reporter," said Ritzy after a moment. "Name of Hollister, I think. He's harmless."

The curtained car slid noiselessly to the curb.

"Go get her, Ritzy," ordered his chief. "Bugs reported from downtown that Spiridon's at the restaurant. Give her the usual line—her husband's hurt—anything you wish."

The dapper Ritzy descended and strolled up to the door. Across the street, Kip Hollister released one hand from the newspaper and felt of his coat-pocket. He glanced up and down the empty street, and his lips tightened a little.

Ritzy was descending the steps now, holding the arm of a tired-faced girl whose eyes were reddened. He was leading her toward the car. And then Santell screamed.

"No! Ritzy! Leave her! Get in here! Quick! It's him—it's the dead man——"

Ritzy, startled, stopped and stared. There was a queer-looking, black-clad man walking stiffly up the street. Ritzy blinked. He could have sworn a moment

ago the street was empty. Then with a grunt he jerked the girl forward and hurled her into the car. The motor roared into life.

"No! No! He'll follow us!" That was Santell. "You can't kill him—he won't die!"

The black-clad man had halted, staring curiously at the now moving car. He took a stiff-kneed stride forward. Santell screamed again, and flung the door open.

"Get out!" he shouted to the girl. "Get out—get back to your Guinny devils!" He seized her by the arm, almost hurled her from the car.

Kip, crossing the street in a run, saw the black-clad figure suddenly become tense. Then, as if hurled from a gun, it catapulted after the car. Afterward Kip wondered if it was an illusion that made him think the thing sailed through the air, like a black bird of prey.

Ritzy's gun sputtered from the car, and then Santell caught his arm, forcing him down into the seat.

"No! No! Don't shoot! You can't kill it——"

"Another example," murmured Ritzy, "that you don't have to grow on a tree to be a nut. Let go my arm, you fool!"

He wrenched free, and Santell saw the purpose in his eyes. There is a law of the pack—that the weakest dies. As in a giddy panorama, Santell saw the faces of men he had sent for a ride. His hand jerked downward.

Ritzy's gun flamed, its report mingling with another. But the bullet thudded into the upholstery, and Ritzy, with a gasping cough, sagged sideways in the seat. A second report, deafening in that confined space, and Mick sighed, and bowed over the steering-wheel. Santell thrust the body aside, as he hurled himself into the front seat.

A glance in the rear-vision mirror told him the horror was coming—following with incredible speed. And further back, out-distanced, a second car was speeding after him.

With his foot flat on the floor, Santell raced through the streets with his cargo of dead men. But faster and still faster the shrouded thing sped behind him, gaining—always gaining.

"Holy Snakes!" spoke the driver of the car Kip had commandeered. "That fellow's not running—he's flying! What—what kind of a man is he?"

Kip shook his head without speaking. His lips were white; there was a sickeningly cold feeling in the pit of his stomach, but he had to see this thing through. Live man or dead monster, here was a story, and Kip is a newspaperman.

Santell's car roared high up across a viaduct. Now they were in the older part of the city, where old, dilapidated buildings sagged wearily. The streets were narrower and rougher. But still Santell pressed down on the throttle with never lessening force.

He looked again in the mirror, and choked the scream in his throat. Close behind, close enough to touch the swaying car, was the shrouded man, with a pale, dead face, in which only the eyes were alive. Those eyes seemed to catch and rivet Santell's, as if they had Gorgon power. The eyes of Nick Bouboli!

Something stirred in Santell's mind; something he had read or seen in the movies. With one hand he opened the door of the car, and with his foot, pushed Mick's body into the street. His eyes were glued on the mirror.

And for a moment, the dead thing stopped, sniffing at Mick's body, as a wolf would sniff. Its teeth slashed out, and champed. But only for a moment. Then it was racing after the car again.

The car's front wheels struck an obstruction and were hurled aside. The car leaped the curb, caroming against a wall, and into the street again. It had been sufficient to break the uncanny spell of the *vrykolakas'* eyes. A tire had blown out; the car swerved madly. Santell flung himself through the opened door.

He struck the ground running. He raced between two vacant buildings, into a weed-overgrown areaway. A flight of rickety stairs stretched before him. He stumbled up them, through a door, slammed it and thrust the bolt home.

Panting he leaned against the wall. There was something pad-padding, stiff-legged, outside. Something rattled at the door. Santell crossed and fastened the catches on the broken windows. But suppose the thing smashed in the glass——

There was a movement behind him. Santell whirled about. The dead man stood within the door. Behind him the bolt still rested solidly in its socket. The pale face—the face of Nick Bouboli—with tautly drawn skin, was expressionless. The eyes glowed redly as with a fire not their own, but they held neither malice nor pity nor hate, nor any emotion whatsoever.

With a bubbling moan on his lips, Santell shrank back against the wall. His outspread arms pressed tightly against the crumbling plaster as if to force a way through. Shambling, stiff-kneed, the thing came toward him—came almost to him and stopped. It came so close he could smell the musty odor from the shroud, could see powdery patches of mildew on it. But though the thing's body swayed forward with the effort, it came no closer. It was as if invisible steel bonds held it fast.

And then Santell, his arms still outstretched, understood, and croaked a laugh.

"The cross," he babbled. "The cross—my own body—a cross."

After a moment, the thing ceased struggling, as if sensing the futility of it. It stood silent, motionless, its expressionless eyes, with their red glow, fixed unwinkingly on Santell. And the gangster chief understood.

Already he felt the first premonitory aching in his arms. It would be a physical impossibility to hold his arms outspread for long. Experimentally, he lowered them a little, and jerked them frantically back again, as the thing moved a half-pace forward. Evidently only a fully formed cross, not one with a sagging cross-arm, had power to restrain it.

Half an hour to live, maybe less. Santell gritted his teeth. Once again the giddy panorama of dead men danced before his eyes—men he had taken for a ride, men sent up in flaming death by bombs; men riddled and blasted by machine-guns, men sagging and dying before blazing pistols. Only this morning, the bride in her veil and gown, the little flower-girl——

"Oh, God!" choked Santell. "They wanted to live, too——"

But clearer than all the rest, he saw a night-darkened country road, a curtained car, a frightened, pleading, kneeling man. He heard the rattle and crack of pistols, he saw the sprawled body on the ground—the body of Nick Bouboli.

And now the body of Nick Bouboli stood before him. The jaws of the dead thing were working; a slow, rhythmical champ, champ. Santell closed his eyes, and opened them again in horror of the darkness. Those yellow teeth—how they had gnawed on Dink's body——

There were voices shouting, faint and far away, in the street. Two voices came closer—must be down in the areaway.

Maybe that car that was following him——

"Help!" screamed Santell. "Help! Oh, God! Help! Quick!"

Then he saw that solidly bolted door. Help, if it came, couldn't enter. And if it did—what could any man do against this dead thing?

His arms were aching more and more. In spite of him, they sagged a little. The rhythm of moving jaws increased a little. There were footsteps on the stairs; someone rattled the door.

"Break it down!" pleaded Santell. "Help me, quick! I can't—can't keep my arms up—much longer——"

His arms drooped again. He forced aching muscles to pull them up again. He set his teeth against a scream. There was expression in the red-glowing eyes now. Out at the zoo, Santell had seen that expression before. In the eyes of beasts when keepers came around with meat—raw meat.

The thought of animals sent a fresh memory stirring in the recesses of his mind. Wild beasts—he must have seen it in a movie somewhere—afraid of fire—shrinking away from it—he couldn't keep his arms up much longer—wouldn't make any difference then—but fire—how to get it? His cigarette-lighter——

It was in his vest-pocket; a patent type that opened and ignited in a single movement. He drew in his stomach, thus loosening his vest, ready for the flashing movement. There were no further sounds from the stairway—must have gone away—after police——

Tensing himself, Santell moved. His arms darted down. Two fingers caught the little gold lighter. Under his thumb, the top snapped back; a pale flame sprang up from the wick. The Thing shrank back.

But only for a moment. Santell had had no time to grasp the lighter carefully. The flame licked out at his flesh. His scorched fingers released their clasp, before his horror-deadened brain could function; the muscles of his wrist jerked in instinctive, reflex action. The lighter flew to one side.

KIP HOLLISTER, sidling laboriously along a narrow ledge, at last reached the window toward which he had been climbing. From a broken pane of glass, a wisp of smoke was curling. Kip peered inside.

In some manner, a pile of discarded newspapers had caught fire. Little tongues of flame were reaching out to lick dry woodwork. But at this Kip scarcely glanced.

Face upward, lifeless eyes glaring madly, the body of Santell lay sprawled. And over it bent a black shape, that gnawed and worried and tore. Champing jaws dripped blood——

Dizzy and sick, Kip crept away.

And long before the first fire engine screamed and thundered into the areaway, leaping flames were roaring through the roof.

But Kip, his eyes riveted on the stairway, down which no living thing—or dead—had passed, was mumbling Papa Metro's words:

"Only fire may totally destroy them."

The Witch-Doctor

By LIEUTENANT EDGAR GARDINER

A grim and powerful story of how a white man ran afoul of African vodu-magic

"TELL the great chief, 'Mpisane, that I am come to make him and his young men rich, Ubi. Lay it on good and thick." Bill McGovern flashed a swift smile at his Zulu induna [headman] and a barely perceptible wink as he stood with folded arms before his imposing cavalcade.

"All ri', Bwana. I tell him. But I think no good. You get black fella here bifo'; you savee?" The Zulu stepped forward and faced the scowling low-veldt tribesman. In the Tshangana dialect he began a long oration touching upon the chief's greatness, his justice, his generosity, his magnificence, and after he had, as he thought, sufficiently flattered him he delivered the white man's message.

In reply, the seated chief delivered an address quite as long. His face was stern, the men of the kraal grouped behind him scowled sullenly. The chief made no sign to his followers to take up the bolt of red calico, the half-dozen or more strings of gaudy beads nor any other of the glittering trade goods that McGovern had ordered his Zulu induna to unpack.

"What did he say, Ubi?" McGovern hardly waited for the chief to finish before he asked the question.

"He say doing nothing. He say four rains ago you skin him. He gib you forty-leben young men from this kraal. You promise t'ree shilling a day fo' work in mine. They no get. You promise him son induna job in mine police. He no get. He say you bum, you crook. He say get t'ell out. Go way!"

McGovern smiled crookedly.

"I forgot that little deal, Ubi," he said. "Smooth it over, can't you?"

"Me 'fraid not, Bwana, but me try." The Zulu's eyes were troubled. Though the renegade labor contractor McGovern had broken laws impartially, both the white man's and the Kaffir's rules, though he had treated the natives he hired like dogs, lied to them, yet he had been as a god to the Zulu ever since that time when his rifle had stopped the charge of a wounded lion just as the Zulu boy had given himself up as lost.

To McGovern Ubi owed his life; he had served him faithfully ever since and he was the only person in all Africa that McGovern had treated fairly and honestly.

Ubi spoke to the scowling chief and his assembled warriors long and earnestly, but to no avail. That personage relented only in so far as to permit McGovern's safarai to stay at the kraal through the night, now fast approaching. When day dawned again they must leave; on that point the chief was adamant.

McGovern only grunted as the troubled Ubi told him this. A bullock was brought up and slaughtered, though not before the wily 'Mpisane had exacted and received full payment. The considerable body of young men that McGovern had recruited from other kraals far up-country fell upon the fresh meat with a will. The Kaffirs of 'Mpisane's kraal held themselves sullenly aloof. Ubi saw to it that his master was fed; he bustled about

"Scattering burning brands in all directions, the spinning figure toppled backward into the steaming pot."

assuring himself that there had been no desertions since the morning and saw that there was sleeping room for all in the huts assigned to the safarai.

Before the hut that was McGovern's a fire blazed cheerfully, a blaze Ubi had been at much pains to kindle before he left on his other duties. The Zulu stopped and stared at the scene before him as he returned.

McGovern was seated as he had left him while before him danced and gibbered an apparition that caused Ubi to gasp with fright—a withered, wrinkled, grizzled old man clad in filthy ragged skins from which the hair had been worn off in spots. Hideously painted, adorned with bracelets and anklets of snake- and lizard-skins, he wore upon his breast a necklace of small inflated bladders. In his black claw-like hand a rattle shook and swung. More like a monkey than a man—more like a wild beast than either—Ubi's nostrils twitched as he scented that wild animal smell, Ubi's skin turned greenish with fright as he saw those eyes glowing like a dog's or a leopard's in the swift darkness. No need for him to ask what that revolting specimen was—Ubi knew he must be a witch-doctor, a sorcerer—Ubi knew in his inmost heart that he was a powerful one.

That McGovern knew not a word of what the sorcerer was saying, Ubi was sure; McGovern knew almost nothing of the numerous native tongues of Kaffirland. Ubi doubted whether the white man knew even what that figure was who was binding an incantation upon him before his very eyes.

The figure stopped short in his antics. From its lips came a wild inhuman laugh that froze Ubi's blood in his veins. Slowly the witch-doctor glided ghost-like

toward the immobile white man, one dirty talon extended.

McGovern sprang to his feet, overturning the folding table behind which he sat. Ubi gasped again as he saw his master lay rude hands upon that dread one, saw him whirl the witch-doctor around and send his slight form spinning.

Just beyond the two was a Kaffir cook-fire over which boiled and bubbled one of the huge Kaffir pots filled with mealy mush. The spinning figure careened into the fire, scattering burning brands in all directions; it toppled backward into the steaming pot.

For a moment all of those numerous human figures in the dim kraal seemed carved from stone. The witch-doctor screamed eerily. He struggled madly to his feet, overturning the pot, and rushed off into the darkness in a swirling cloud of steam.

McGovern's loud boyish laugh broke the paralysis that chained Ubi to the spot. He rushed forward and clasped his master's knees in shaking arms.

"Bwana! Bwana!" he gasped.

McGovern shook himself free.

"Who was that filthy beggar, Ubi?" he asked. "Ugh! How he stunk! I'll bet that I burned some of that filth off him, at any rate!" He chuckled again.

Ubi shuddered.

"He great witch-doctor, Bwana. Me, I think 'Mpisane send him to make ebil spell on you 'cause him son die in mine."

McGovern swore violently.

"The dirty black devil! I've a good mind to go and settle with 'Mpisane right now!"

"No, Bwana, no!" Ubi's fright was pathetic. "That debil man make charm 'gainst you. He gib you much bad luck. No good see 'Mpisane! No good fight: you get speared!"

McGovern turned carelessly away.

"All right, Ubi. Tomorrow morning you go on with all the boys. Take the path that leads through the forest to 'Mbala's kraal; the police won't be looking for us to go that far out of our way. I'll stay here with 'Mpisane another day and then follow you with what boys I can persuade him to hire out to me."

Ubi's heart constricted.

"No, no, Bwana!" he almost whimpered. "You come long me. You no do, mebbeso you die! Him bad debil man; make big medicine 'gainst you!"

"Who? 'Mpisane?" McGovern chuckled.

Ubi shivered.

"No! Other one! Witch-doctor! Him Soloyi! Him *hawii impaka* [familiar spirit or werewolf]! Him *infakabili* [vampire or reawakened corpse]!"

McGovern smiled grimly.

"And you are a Zulu!" he said scornfully. "You talk like a Kaffir dog!"

Ubi's head lifted.

"I am an induna of the Zulus," he said proudly. "In my veins flows the blood of Chaka. You have said it! Tomorrow I will lead the safarai as the Bwana commands. But five askaris shall stay with the Bwana. It is not good for him to go alone through the great trees. Tonight I shall watch over my Bwana, but tomorrow when I am gone he must guard himself carefully."

"Oh, nonsense!" McGovern retorted impatiently. Yet in spite of his rough manner he was impressed by the evident sincerity of that simple African. He would have been still more impressed could he have realized to the full the awe and superstitious dread with which all natives regarded sorcerers and witch-doctors in general and Soloyi in particular.

He must have seen it, however, had he noticed how every one in the kraal, in-

cluding the boys of his own safarai as well as 'Mpisane's people, kept well away from him, casting upon him the pitying looks they would have directed against a condemned criminal doomed to a speedy and terrible death.

THE fire had died to a bed of coals that glowed through the chill night like a monstrous evil eye. Before its dying warmth Ubi nodded in the thin night wind, wrapped in his kaross. His two assegais lay beside him ready to his hand. The night had been uneventful save for the usual night noises of the veldt and the bush, the howl of jackals, the occasional weird laughing wail of a hyena, the most cowardly animal of that mysterious land.

The moon was low in the west. It cast only a feeble glow over the sleeping kraal. On the bare hard-packed open spot before McGovern's sleeping-quarters a small figure leaped and capered noiselessly, now advancing, now retreating, drawing ever nearer to the nodding Zulu squatted before the low doorway.

Ubi started. His nodding head jerked upright. His sleepy eyes opened stupidly as some dim inward warning pierced his consciousness. The wild capering figure seemed to merge with the heavier shadows, to melt into the blackness. Once more Ubi's chin sank slowly to his chest.

He started bolt upright as a wild inhuman laugh burst upon his amazed eardrums. From the tail of his eye he seemed to see something scuttling into the dense shadows. Ubi's assegai whistled toward the spot. Another of those blood-curdling laughs that froze his heart was the only answer. Thrusting a ready torch into the dying coals until it was well ablaze he rushed into the hut, his heart filled with anxiety for his master.

The figure under the draped mosquito netting stirred and muttered restlessly. The air within the hut was foul and fetid with a stifling musky odor that turned Ubi's blood to water. It was all he could do to keep from rushing headlong from that ill-omened spot. Under his rough anxious shaking McGovern sat up yawning and rubbing his eyes.

"You all ri', Bwana? You all ri'?" Ubi's voice was solicitous, his rolling terrified eyes filled with a deep concern.

"Of course I'm all right, Ubi! . . . Have you been awake all night?" McGovern asked incredulously as he eyed his trusted right-hand man.

Ubi was shamefaced.

"I go to sleep befo' the fire, Bwana," he muttered. "I have long hard day."

"How well I know it, Ubi!" McGovern answered. He sniffed. "Phew! What is that smell, Ubi? Ugh! It's stifling! Let's get out of this."

Leisurely he began to replace the few articles he had removed when he turned in.

"Hi, Ubi! What's this?" He held up his shirt before the induna's amazed eyes and pointed to the foul fetid mess that polluted it. "And it's on my boots, too!" Ruefully he eyed them, their soles filthy with the same sticky defilement.

"Where's my neckerchief?" he asked fretfully a moment later, looking about in the flickering shadows of Ubi's uplifted torch. "Some damned nigger has stolen it!" he exploded as further search failed to reveal the article in question.

Ubi's heart was heavy. His worst fears were confirmed. That foul, ill-smelling, sticky defilement smeared so liberally upon his master's garments and blankets —it could betoken but one thing. While Ubi nodded, overcome by the long day's trek and the added night's vigil, Soloyi, the wizard, had come to the hut. Enraged beyond endurance by the indignity

which he had suffered at McGovern's hands, he had worked an even more powerful spell upon the sleeping white man.

He it must have been who had taken McGovern's flame-silk neckerchief, and he could have wanted it for but one reason: to work an *iziwedwe* charm against the white man he had such good reason to hate with an undying enmity.

Ubi's heart grew more troubled still, were that possible. He was sure in his own mind that McGovern's days were numbered. But now, not only McGovern would suffer from the *imfakabili's* wrath. Nothing but ill luck could follow any one who had anything at all to do with that fated white man.

"It must have been one of 'Mpisane's young men who took that scarf," McGovern grumbled at last when he was thoroughly convinced that the red silk article was indeed gone for good. He burst into lurid explosive profanity when further search revealed the shockingly filthy state of his blankets.

"I'll have to take them down to the river and wash the whole lot. But when I am done with that I'm coming back to this kraal, and what I will do to 'Mpisane and his tribe will be plenty. You had better leave me a dozen askaris, Ubi. Now go rout out those boys and get the safarai on the trail as soon as you can. Once you are past 'Mbala's village I shall feel safer; the damned Constabulary keep a close watch along the Balule River."

UBI had the safarai ready to move within an hour. He told off a dozen of the older hunting men to attend McGovern and through somber eyes he watched his master move through the thorny enclosure of the kraal toward the river's steeply crumbling bank with his unsavory burden. About the other huts of 'Mpisane's kraal no other soul stirred as yet. Ubi was about to sign his safarai to march when a startled shout came from below the edge of that bank, followed an instant later by the sharp whip-like crack of McGovern's revolver. Like a lithe black shadow he sprang on McGovern's track. He came upon a white-faced, shaken figure.

"A croc almost got me, Ubi," the other gasped. "I had just bent over the water with my blankets when the devil shot in, snapping his jaws almost on my arm! I shot at him and I think I got him through the eye. Couldn't make sure, but he churned the water into foam as he went under."

Ubi looked out over the stream. From every direction he thought he saw those almost submerged scaly snouts edging closer to the shallow spot where the two stood. He pointed them out to his master with shaking arm. McGovern gazed with incredulous eyes.

"What the devil!" he gasped. "I never saw crocs come into such shallow water before; and now all of these beasts seem to be coming closer! That damnable scent must attract them!"

"It is the work of Soloyi, the wizard," Ubi almost whispered. "Bwana, do not stay here longer. Leave this place with me," he implored.

For a brief moment McGovern seemed inclined to heed his induna.

"I'll be damned if I do!" he snapped with a swift change of heart. His outthrust jaw was pugnacious. He glanced at the shaking askaris grouped just out of earshot.

"Tell those boys to come down here with their spears, Ubi. I'm going to wash these blankets if I never do another thing! It's this stinking stuff that draws the crocodiles here. . . . Now, get that gang of laborers on the move, Ubi."

Again he bent over the shallow stream edge while the askaris, their spears ready for the first crocodile that should venture close, drew reluctantly about him as Ubi had ordered them to do. One long moment Ubi watched the determined back of his master; then with a long sigh he moved slowly back to his task, firmly believing that he was seeing that beloved form for the last time.

It was long after noon when, after numerous unforeseen delays, Ubi reached the ford on the Balule river opposite 'Mbala's kraal. His heart sank as he saw khaki-clad figures moving upon the farther shore. The South African Constabulary! They were waiting for McGovern and his illegally hired blacks!

In his inmost heart Ubi had more than expected such a stroke of ill luck. He wondered if this were also the work of Soloyi, the witch-doctor. But on second thought he was sure that the wizard had nothing at all to do with it. 'Mpisane, or perhaps 'Maokeng, both of them disgruntled chiefs who had dealt with McGovern before to their lasting sorrow—either one of them could easily have warned the troopers, though it was pure guesswork as to the white man's probable course from their kraals. Perhaps troopers were covering all the fords along the Balule.

Ubi decided that a bold front was the safest as he splashed through the shallow water of the ford ahead of the shouting column. He was not surprized to see native sergeant Madolena awaiting him on the other shore. Just behind Madolena he saw trooper MacEwan, who twice before had been McGovern's nemesis. Ubi's heart sank forebodingly.

"Where's McGovern?" The white policeman's voice was brusk.

"Bwana, I do not know," Ubi lied.

MacEwan's eyebrows lifted.

"Where do these boys come from?" he barked.

"From the kraal of 'Mpisane, Bwana," Ubi's voice was bland.

Both troopers chuckled.

"Ubi, you are a poor liar," the white man began sternly. "Not all white policemen are fools. You should have had these men change the tribal mark on their foreheads."

Under his breath Ubi cursed the wise policeman.

"You can go back the way you came, Ubi," the trooper went on. "Take the white Bwana's askaris and his goods with you. We will see that these others are returned to their own villages. And when next you see the white Bwana, tell him that if I catch him on this side of the river it will cost him much money."

Nothing loth, Ubi and his hunters recrossed the ford, thankful that they had been allowed to go free. Indeed, there was no other course for the two troopers to pursue; they would have their hands full enough with that long safarai without a score of prisoners to guard besides.

Ubi's mind was filled with his master's troubles as he trotted along through the forest. A long, hard two months' trek McGovern had made. His expenses had been heavy, he had paid liberally in trade goods, backsheesh to the chiefs of the kraals where he had recruited those young men for the mines on the Rand. Had he gotten them safely to their destination McGovern would have made a handsome profit on his investment. And now Ubi had to find McGovern and tell him that his investment was a total loss, that the laborers recruited at the cost of so much trekking and trouble were in the hands of the Constabulary, who were even then taking them back to those far-off villages from which they came. All that was left

to the Bwana were the few bundles of trade goods that the askaris bore upon their heads as they followed Ubi.

UBI wondered just where he would find the Bwana. Perhaps McGovern followed Ubi's own plain spoor; yet he might easily have taken some other path to the Balule, intending to rejoin the safarai only when night fell. The Zulu hurried on at top speed, trying to reach 'Mpisane's kraal before the darkness fell.

His little cavalcade came to an open spot in the dense bush. On the farther edge of the opening under a great fig tree that thrust its gnarled roots down over a high bank, Ubi glimpsed a cluster of natives who milled uncertainly about a figure that lay on the ground. Once more Ubi's heart sank. Even at that distance he could tell that these were not Kaffirs from the kraal he had left that morning. Through the blue haze he could see the little gray monkeys high up in the fig tree, eating the dusty tasteless fruit. Yet it was not such paltry games as these that engaged the attention of those hunters.

As he and his askaris neared the group Ubi's worst fears were confirmed; the figure on the ground was that of his white Bwana. Ubi turned faint as he looked upon the horribly mutilated figure. This was the final working-out of the witch-doctor's spell. Soloyi the powerful wizard had scored at last.

A dozen voices were shouting out the details as he dropped to his haunches beside McGovern, how a leopard crouched upon a branch that overhung the path had dropped upon the unsuspecting white man's back, how beast and man had moved so swiftly and in such close embrace that the askaris could not spear the one without certainly killing the other, how the white Bwana had managed finally to draw his revolver and, while the beast chewed upon his right arm and its terrible claws slashed his flesh to bloody ribbons, he had managed to thrust the pistol against its broad flat head and with his left hand had fired the single shot that had snuffed out its life.

The white man was not dead, in spite of those terrible injuries; his face and body were deeply scored by the sharp claws, but he yet lived. In proof thereof Ubi's master opened his eyes. In a voice of cold menace Ubi sent several of the group after water. The stream was less than a mile away. With a deft skill the Zulu bound up the injuries as best he could until his master was swathed like some newly exhumed mummy, while Ubi drew liberally upon the supplies in the white man's medicine chest. The rude surgery and slight knowledge of medicines that McGovern had taught him as an idle whim at odd moments through the years they had been together had once again come into good use.

The Bwana had lost a great deal of blood. He suffered excruciating pain from the numerous cuts that almost covered his body, fainting away time and again as Ubi continued his ministrations. McGovern's boys returned with the water and Ubi washed all those scores and gashes out thoroughly with strong antiseptics. The great danger, Ubi knew from past experience, was not from any of these but from the gangrene that might start in their bases from the filth left there by the beast's claws.

To move the injured man from the spot where he had fallen was unthinkable; Ubi commanded the askaris to build a shelter over him where he lay, threatening them with dire punishment with a *kiboko* should they bolt and leave the two as those natives seemed momentarily on the point of doing. Nor would he permit them to build a mere hunter's shelter, a thatched roof set on poles; he

insisted on a stout walled hut such as made up the native kraals.

Only after that was done did he bid them construct shelters for their own use not too far distant from the other, and watched them boil the mealy mush for their evening meal while they glanced uneasily into the bush behind them or into that vaguely lighted clearing that their superstitious minds peopled with a thousand and one terrors.

Ubi scooped a shallow hole in the hut's earthen floor for a fireplace; he spared a few moments of the fast-disappearing daylight to cut a heap of mimosa thorn with which to fill the door opening later; and last of all, from among his scanty possessions he drew forth some strips of aromatic bark. Carefully he cut it into strips and spread them end to end in a narrow continuous circle about the white man who tossed restlessly under his blankets while he raved or muttered in recurring fits of delirium.

But one thing remained to be done for the night. Ubi kindled a fire in the depression for light and drew forth his most prized possession, the silver ring that was his sole ornament. Using one stone for a hammer and another for an anvil he beat the soft metal into a rude bullet; carefully he extracted the leaden pellet from a cartridge and replaced it with the makeshift silver one. Painstakingly he smoothed it until it fitted snugly into the chamber of his master's rifle, laying that close beside him when at last he was satisfied with his workmanship.

Ubi cherished no delusions in his mind. Only the white Bwana's death would satisfy Soloyi; the curse of that insatiable monster still hung over his master. McGovern's grit and his tremendous vitality had saved him from the leopard that Ubi was certain had waited above the path in obedience to Soloyi's magic powers; yet the Zulu was quite sure that other and more powerful forces would be invoked by that enraged devil-charmer.

That the leopard was a "magic" beast summoned by weird incantations to lie in wait for the white Bwana and do upon him the bidding of Soloyi, Ubi was as firmly convinced as were all of McGovern's askaris. It had failed and lost its life, but others would come until one did not fail.

The induna's heart was like water as he contemplated that grim fact, faced the knowledge that perhaps this very night other beasts led by Soloyi in person would strive to complete the work so nearly done by the dead leopard. He shook with fear of those unknown but certain terrors; yet his love and fidelity to the white man who once had saved his life held him stedfast to his purpose.

The askaris built a ring of fires about their rude brush shelters; from the great heap of fuel they had gathered they kept those flames burning brightly. The moon rose slowly in the east, flooding the clearing with silver radiance while it left deep impenetrable shadows under the great fig tree and in the bush that grew down to the clearing on all sides.

Ubi forgot his weariness, he forgot that he had eaten nothing, he kept anxious watch from within the hut. The thorny mimosa almost filled the door opening, yet left a clear field above it for Ubi's frightened eyes. Often while he crouched there motionless, the Zulu fondled his master's gun as though he would gain fresh courage and assurance from the feel of its cold metal.

MIDNIGHT came. The moon had sunk almost to the level of the surrounding trees. Half the clearing lay in darkness. Ubi, worn out by his two sleepless days and nights, nodded often in spite of his most determined efforts to keep awake.

Far away, from the direction of the mountain known locally as the "Elephant's Back," came a burst of wild bestial laughter. That inhuman sound banished all sleep from Ubi's eyes. That the askaris heard it too and feared, their wild excited chatter showed, and the upward-leaping flames about their camp as they added fresh fuel to the ring of fires.

Again that weird call sounded, nearer now, and more menacing than ever. In seeming answer, from all about the bush came a chorus of wild howls. The clearing was ringed with them; whichever way Ubi glanced he saw twin points of glowing greenish light, the malevolent eyes of—were they really hyenas? Slowly those flashing moving eyes closed in about the hut. Ubi lost all hope.

The wounded man tossed and moaned under his netting, in his restless movements casting the blankets from him until they trailed upon the floor. His voice rose in new delirium.

"The Inkossi! The Inkossi!"

Ubi shivered and icy fingers clutched his heart. His master's voice went on babbling about "the Thing." What was it that his disordered mind was picturing?

In the deepening blackness of the clearing half-seen forms were swarming, gathering, their eyes glowing at Ubi as they flitted from one clump of scrub to another. Always in front and apparently acting as leader of that mixed band trotted a great hyena. The usually cowardly beast was moving directly toward the thorn-filled doorway.

Ubi raised McGovern's gun in shaking hands. Gradually its wavering muzzle steadied, held true upon that dusky form. He pulled the trigger. The roar of the heavy rifle was thunderous in that enclosed confined space; the recoil from the heavy charge sent Ubi flying on his back half-way across the hut.

Swiftly he scrambled to his feet, his ears deafened by the clamor without, no less than by the noise the rifle had made. He heard a screaming half-human howling that moved from the clearing to die rapidly away in the distance.

Ubi's shaking hands piled fresh fuel upon his fire until the leaping flames threatened to touch the thatch roof above his head. When he glanced out into the clearing again the shadowy beasts with the flaming eyes had entirely disappeared.

Again the sick man's voice rose, calling this time for his induna:

"Ubi! Ubi!"

The Zulu stepped to his side. No delirious voice this; his Bwana's reason had returned.

"Ubi! Ubi!" McGovern's voice was stronger.

The tousled blankets caught the black's eye, his strong arms grasped their nearest edges to shake them out and restore them about his master's form. With a sudden convulsive movement he hurled them from him into a disordered heap upon the floor. His incredulous eyes had seen that long black form arise waist-high from among them. From the wicked expanded head swaying back and forth had come a hiss like a punctured rubber tire, the eyes glowed like tiny twin flames. Ubi's wide eyes saw the expanded hood with its white markings, saw the flickering tongue darting in and out. From the outspread fangs darted two white spurts of venomous saliva ere the falling blankets entangled it in their voluminous folds.

"Imfezi!" Ubi breathed as he recognized the dreaded spitting cobra, the Ringhalz, whose venomous spittle, aimed always at the face and eyes, meant days of agony and frequently total blindness. He sprang for the gun, raised it on high by the barrel and brought the heavy stock

down again and again upon the threshing form still entangled in the woolen cloths.

When at last the thing had ceased its convulsive struggles, Ubi brought forth his own blankets, opened them carefully one by one, and covered the bandaged figure with them. McGovern's eyes regarded him keenly.

"A . . . damned . . . close . . . squeak, . . . what?" he whispered through his torn lips. Though the movement must have brought him untold agony he screwed the torn facial muscles into the ghost of a smile.

"Ubi, you are a Zulu—and a man!" His eyes closed. Ubi did not know whether he had lapsed into unconsciousness again or had gone to sleep as he crouched beside him.

IT SEEMED ages to the watchful black before the dawn, but it came at long last, that breathlessly beautiful, ecstatic moment that is Africa's greatest charm. The clearing without was bare of moving life, though animal tracks were thick everywhere Ubi looked. The askaris roused and their loud gabble rose as they kindled their fires anew and prepared their morning meal. The noise once more roused Ubi, whom sleep had overwhelmed at last as he crouched close to the white Bwana's couch.

The Induna rose slowly and stretched his stiffened aching muscles. He dragged McGovern's blankets to the doorway, eyeing the break in the ring of membizi bark that the overturned ends had made when the sick man had tossed them off and through which the deadly snake had undoubtedly made its entrance.

Gingerly Ubi tore away the thorns that he had packed into the hut's one entrance. Carefully he unrolled the blankets, picked up the dead body of the cobra and tossed it carelessly into that augmented cooking-fire.

An askari brought him food as he returned to his post at the bedside; food that he ate abstractedly while he pondered gloomily upon the curse that overhung his master. What would be the next disaster and when and where would it strike?

A shout sounded from the farther end of the clearing, renewed gabbling arose from the askaris' shelters; Ubi crawled through the low doorway and rose to face another of those hated khaki-clad constables of the S. A. C. Hated and feared, yes; but also welcome now in this district where they had no jurisdiction, for this one might possess a greater knowledge of medicine than Ubi's own and his advice might enable the Zulu's Bwana to recover more surely.

Wonderingly Corporal Angus Ferguson gazed at the bandaged figure and from him to the Zulu who was pouring out this incredible story.

"Soloyi? Soloyi the Witch-doctor? What black man's foolishness is this that you try to tell me? How could Soloyi have had anything to do with your camp last night? Look you! Soloyi is dead! When I crossed the ford in the early morning I came upon that one's body lying upon the path that leads to 'Mpisane's kraal. He had been shot through the body from before. What black man would dare to stand so before him and kill? Long have I looked for Soloyi; for many moons I have sought him that he should answer for his many crimes. Now he is dead and who shall tell who did the welcome deed? Look, Zulu! Here is the bullet that brought the great Soloyi down. Through his chest it sped and lodged under the skin upon his back."

The red-haired white policeman held out a shining bit of metal that still bore gruesome crimson stains upon its scratched surface, a shining bit of hammered silver beaten rudely into a rough bullet.

The Devil's Bride

By SEABURY QUINN

An astonishing novel of eery murders, the devil-worshipping Yezidees, and the infamous Mass of St. Secaire

The Story Thus Far

BEAUTIFUL Alice Hume vanished during the final rehearsal for her wedding in the presence of her fiancé and a group of friends including her mother, her family physician Doctor Samuel Trowbridge, and Trowbridge's eccentric associate, the French physician-detective, Doctor Jules de Grandin. The little Frenchman discovered traces of a yellow powder which, he explained to Trowbridge, was *bulala-gwai,* the "little death" used by natives of the French Congo to produce temporary paralysis. Alice, he declared, had been abducted while the wedding party was rendered unconscious by *bulala-gwai.*

De Grandin also believed the disappearance to be connected with a girdle of tanned human skin he had admired on Alice. The girl told him that the belt was known as "the luck of the Humes" and had been in the family a long time.

He found a concealed document in the family Bible, written by Alice's ancestor, David Hume, and relating how he had been sold as a slave to the devil-worshipping Yezidees, had rescued the daughter of their chief from becoming the "bride of Satan," had married her and later brought her to America.

Despite a sentence in the old manuscript that warned Hume's descendants that an attempt might some time be made to "bring home" one of the daughters of his line, Alice's mother refused to admit any connection between the Yezidee legend and her daughter's disappearance. But that very night Mrs. Hume was found murdered by a strangling-cord in her own boudoir.

A young, unbaptized boy was spirited away from a near-by Baptist home, and a veiled lady, who had turned against the Yezidees, was stolen out of the jail and later found crucified in the garden of a convent, before de Grandin had obtained from her the information he wanted.

Inspector Renouard, of the French secret service, arrived from overseas on the trail of the Yezidees, and joined de Grandin and Sergeant Costello of the local police. At once they were startled by the case of a young woman whose hands were cut off, tongue cut out and eyes blinded, presumably by the Yezidees. De Grandin undertakes the seemingly impossible task of finding out from her who were her assailants.

THE clanging ambulance arrived in a few minutes, for the call Costello sent was urgent, and a bored young intern, collegiate raccoon coat slipped on over his whites, entered the cottage, the stretcher-bearers close behind him. "Hear you got a pretty bad case here——" he began, then straightened as he saw de Grandin. "Oh, I didn't know *you* were in charge here, Doctor," he finished.

The little Frenchman, whose uncanny skill at surgery had made his name a byword in the local clinics, smiled amiably. "Quickly, *mon brave,*" he ordered. "It is imperative that we should get her hence

"Say your prayers, if you know any, you——" he began, but Costello intervened.

as rapidly as possible. I desire to converse with her."

"O. K., sir," the youngster answered. "What's wrong?" he drew out his report card and poised a pencil over it.

De Grandin nodded to the litter-bearers to begin their task as he replied: "Both hands amputated by transverse cuts incising the *pronator quadratus;* the tongue clipped across at the apex, both eyes blinded by transverse knife cuts across the cornea and striking through the anterior chamber and crystalline lens."

"You—she's had all that done to her, an' you're going to *converse* with her?" the boy asked incredulously. "Don't you mean——"

"I mean precisely what I say, *mon vieux,"* de Grandin told him positively. "I shall ask her certain questions, and she shall answer me. Come, make haste, or it may be too late."

At the hospital, de Grandin, aided by a wondering nurse and intern, removed the old Italian woman's makeshift bandages from the girl's severed wrists, applied a strong anodyne liniment of aconite, opium and chloroform, and wound fresh wrappings on the stumps with the speed and skill of one who

served a long and strenuous apprenticeship in trench dressing-stations and field hospitals.

Some time elapsed before the strong narcotic soup administered by the old Italian lost its effect, but at length the patient showed slight signs of consciousness.

"Ma fille," de Grandin said, leaning forward till his lips were almost against the maimed girl's bandaged face, "you are in great trouble. You are temporarily deprived of speech and sight, but it is necessary that you tell us what you can, that we may apprehend those who did this thing to you. At present you are in Mercy Hospital, and here you will be given every care.

"Attend me carefully, if you please. I shall ask you questions. You shall answer me by spelling. Thus"—he seated himself at the foot of the bed and placed his hand lightly on the blanket where her feet lay—"for *a* you will move your foot once, for *b* twice, and so on through the alphabet. You understand?"

A pause, then a slight movement underneath the bedclothes, twenty-five twitches of the foot, then five, finally nineteen: "Y-e-s."

"Très bon, let us start." Drawing a notebook from his pocket he rested it upon his knee, then poised a stylographic pen above it. "Leave us, if you will, my friends," he ordered. "We shall be better if alone.

"Now, *ma pauvre?"* he turned toward the mutilated girl, ready to begin his interrogatory.

SOMETHING like an hour later he emerged from the sickroom, tears gleaming in his eyes and a taut, hard look about his mouth. "It is finished—done—completed," he announced, sinking wearily into a chair and in defiance of every house rule drawing out an evil-smelling French cigarette and setting it alight.

"What's finished?" I demanded.

"Everything; all!" he answered. "My questioning and the poor one; both together. Name of a miracle, I spoke truth when I told her that blond lie and said her loss of sight and speech was temporary, for now she sees and sings in God's own Paradise. The shock and loss of blood she suffered were too much—she is gone."

He drew a handkerchief from his cuff and wiped his eyes, then:

"But not until she told me all did she depart," he added fiercely. "Give me a little time to put my notes in order, and I shall read them to you."

Three-quarters of an hour later he and I, Costello and Renouard were closeted in the superintendent's office.

"Her name was Veronica Brady," he began, referring to his transcript of the notes he had taken in the dead girl's room, "and she lived beneath the hill the other side the convent. She was an operative in the Hammel factory, and was due at work at slightly after seven. In order to arrive in time she had to take an early bus, and as the snow was deep, she set out early to meet the vehicle on the highway. As she was toiling up the hill this morning she was attracted by a group of people skirting the convent wall, a woman and three men. The woman was enveloped in some sort of long garment—it seemed to her like a blanket draped round her—and seemed struggling weakly and pleading with the men, two of whom pushed and drove her onward, like a beast to slaughter, while the third one walked ahead and seemed to take no notice of the others.

"They reached the convent wall, and one of the men climbed upon another's shoulders, seized the woman and dragged

her up, then leaped the wall. The second man mounted on the third one's shoulders, reached the wall-crest, then leaned down and assisted his companion up. As the last one paused a moment on the summit of the wall, preparatory to leaping over into the garden, he spied her, jumped down and seized her, then called to his companions. They bade him bring her, and he dragged her to the wall and forced her up to the villain waiting at the top. Thereafter they drew her to the garden, gagged her with handkerchiefs and ripped her stockings off, binding her hands and feet with them. Then, while she sat propped against the wall, she witnessed the whole vile scene. The base miscreants removed the effigy of Christ from the crucifix and broke it into pieces; then with railway spikes they nailed the woman upon the cross, and thrust a crown of barbed wire on her head and set an inscription over her. This done, they stood away and cursed her with all manner of vile oaths and pelted her with snowballs while she hung and died in torment.

"At length the coming of the dawn warned them their time was short, and so they gave attention to their second victim. Explaining that the one whom they had crucified had paid the penalty of talking, they then informed poor Mademoiselle Veronica that they would save her from such fate by making it impossible that she should betray them. And then they took the bindings from her wrists and ankles, made her resume her stockings and walk with them until they reached the wall. Across the wall they carried her; then in the snow outside they bade her kneel and clasp her hands in prayer while she looked her last upon the world.

"The poor child thought they meant to kill her. How little could she estimate their vileness! For, as she folded her hands in supplication, *zic!* a sudden knife-stroke hit her wrists, and scarcely realizing what she did, she found herself looking down at two small, clasped hands, while from her wrists there spurted streams of blood. The blow was quick and the knife sharp; she scarcely felt the stroke, she told me, for it was more like a heavy blow with a fist or club than a severing cut which deprived her of her hands.

"But before she realized what had befallen her she felt her throat seized by rough hands, and she was choked until her tongue protruded. A sudden searing pain, as though a glowing iron had been thrust into her mouth, was followed by a blaze of flashing light; then—darkness—utter, impenetrable darkness, such as she had never known before, fell on her, and in the snow she writhed in agony of mind and body. Shut off from every trace of light and with her own blood choking back the screams for help she tried to give, in her ears was echoed the laughter of her tormenters.

"The next she knew she was lifted from the snow and borne on some one's shoulders to a house, bandages were wound about her wrists and eyes, and anon a biting, bitter mixture was poured into her tortured mouth. Then merciful oblivion until she woke to find herself in Mercy Hospital with Jules de Grandin questioning her.

"Ah, it was pitiful to make her tell this story with her feet, my friends, and very pitiful it was to see her die, but far rather would I have done so than know that she must live, a maimed and blinded creature.

"*Ha,* but I have not done. No. She told me of the men who did this *sacré,* dastard thing. Their leader was a monstrous-looking creature, a person with an old and wrinkled face, not ugly, nor even wicked, but rather sad and thoughtful,

and in his wrinkled face there burned a pair of ageless eyes, all but void of expression, and his body was the lithe, well-formed body of a youth. His voice, too, was gentle, like his eyes, but gentle with the terrible gentleness of the hissing serpent. And though he dressed like us, upon his head was set a scarlet turban ornamented with a great greenish-yellow stone which shone and flickered, even in the half-light of the morning, like the evil eye of a ferocious tiger.

"His companions were similar in dress, although the turbans on their heads were black. One was tall, the other taller. Both were swarthy of complexion, and both were bearded.

"By their complexions and their beards, and especially by their noses, she thought them Jewish. The poor one erred most terribly and slandered a most great and noble race. We know them for what they truly were, my friends, Kurdish hellions, Yezidee followers and worshippers of Satan's unclean self!"

He finished his recital and lit another cigarette. "The net of evidence is woven," he declared. "Our task is now to cast it over them."

"Ye're right there, sor, dead right," Costello agreed. "But how're we goin' to do it?"

De Grandin looked at him a moment, then started as one who suddenly recalls a duty unperformed. "By blue," he cried, "we must at once to Monsieur the Coroner's; we must secure those photographs before it is too late!"

11. The Strayed Sheep

"HULLO, Doctor de Grandin," Coroner Martin greeted as we entered the private office of his luxurious funeral home, "there's been a young man from Morgan's Photonews Agency hanging around here waiting for you for the last hour or so. Said you wanted him to make some pictures, but couldn't say what. It might be all right, then again, it mightn't, and he may be on a snooping expedition —you never can tell with those fellows— so I told him to wait. He's back in the recreation room with my boys now, smoking his head off and cussing you out."

The quick smile with which de Grandin answered was more a mechanical facial contortion than an evidence of mirth. "Quite yes," he agreed. "I greatly desire that you let us make some photographs of *Mademoiselle l'Inconnue*—the nameless lady whose body you took in charge at the convent this morning. We must discover her identity, if possible. Is all prepared according to your promise?"

Professional pride was evident as Mr. Martin answered, "Come and see her, if you will."

She lay upon a bedstead in one of the secluded "slumber rooms"—apartments dedicated to the repose of the dead awaiting casketing and burial—a soft silk comforter draped over her, her head upon a snowy pillow, and I had to look a second time to make sure it was she. With a skill which put the best of Egypt's famed practitioners to shame, the clever-handed mortician had eradicated every trace of violent death from the frail body of the girl, had totally obliterated the nail-marks from her slender hands and erased the cruel wounds of the barbed wire from her brow. Even the deeply burned cross-brands on her cheeks had been effaced, and on her calm, smooth countenance there was a look of peace which simulated natural sleep. The lips, ingeniously tinted, were slightly parted, as though she breathed in light, half-waking slumber, and so perfect was the illusion of life that I could have sworn I saw her bosom flutter with faint respiration.

"Marvellous, *parfait, magnifique!*" de

Grandin pronounced, gazing admiringly at the body with the approval one artist may accord another's work. "If you will now permit the young man to come hither, we shall take the pictures; then we need trouble you no more."

The young news photographer set up his camera at de Grandin's orders, taking several profile views of the dead girl. Finally he raised the instrument till its lens looked directly down upon the calm, still face, and snapped a final picture.

Next day the photographs were broadcast to the papers with the caption: "Who Knows Her? Mystery woman, found wandering in the streets of Harrisonville, N. J., was taken to the psychopathic ward of City Hospital, but managed to escape. Next morning she was found dead from exposure in a garden in the suburbs. Authorities are seeking for some clue to her identity, and any one who recognizes her is asked to notify Sergeant J. Costello, Detective Bureau, Harrisonville Police Dept. (Photo by Morgan's Photonews, Inc.)"

We waited several days, but no response came in. It seemed that we had drawn a blank.

At last, when we had about abandoned hope, the telephone called me from the dinner table, and Costello's heavy voice advised: "There's a young felly down to headquarters, sor, that says he thinks he recognizes that there now unknown gur-rl. Says he saw her picture in th' *Springfield Echo*. Will I take 'im over to th' coroner's?"

"Might as well," I answered. "Ask Mr. Martin to let him look at the body; then, if he still thinks he knows her, bring him over and Doctor de Grandin and I will talk with him."

"Right, sor," Costello promised. "I'll not be botherin' ye wid anny false alarms." I went back to dessert, Renouard and Jules de Grandin.

Some three-quarters of an hour later, while we sipped our postprandial coffee and liqueurs in the drawing-room, the doorbell shrilled and Nora ushered in Costello and a serious-faced young man. "Shake hands wid Mr. Kimble, gentlemen," the sergeant introduced. "He knows her, a'right. Identified her positively. He'll be claimin' th' remains in th' mornin', if ye've no objections."

De Grandin shook hands cordially enough, but his welcome was restrained. "You can tell whence the poor young lady came, and what her name was, perhaps, *Monsieur?*" he asked, when the visitors had been made comfortable with cognac and cigars.

Young Mr. Kimble flushed beneath the little Frenchman's direct, unwinking stare. He was tall, stoop-shouldered, hatchet-faced, bespectacled. Such animation as he had seemed concentrated in his rather large and deep-set hazel eyes. Except for them he was utterly commonplace, a man of neutral coloring, totally undistinguished, doomed by his very nature to the self-effacement consequent upon unconquerable diffidence. "A clerk or bookkeeper," I classified him mentally, "possibly a junior accountant or senior routine worker of some sort." Beside the debonair de Grandin, the fiery and intense Renouard and the brawny, competent Costello he was like a sparrow in the company of tanagers.

Now, however, whatever remnant of emotion remained in his drab, repressed personality welled up as he replied: "Yes, sir, I can tell you; her name was Abigail Kimble. She was my sister."

"U'm?" de Grandin murmured thoughtfully, drawing at his cigar. Then, as the other remained silent:

"You can suggest, perhaps, how it came she was found in the unfortunate condition which led to her incarceration in the hospital, and later to her so de-

plorable demise?" Beneath the shadow of his brows he watched the young man with a cat-stare of unwinking vigilance, alert to note the slightest sign betokening that the visitor had greater knowledge of the case than the meager information in the newspapers supplied.

Young Kimble shook his head. "I'm afraid not," he replied. "I hadn't seen her for two years; didn't have the slightest idea where she was." He paused a moment, fumbling nervously with his cigar; then:

"Whatever I may say will be regarded confidentially?" he asked.

"But certainly," de Grandin answered.

The young man tossed his cigar into the fire and leaned forward, elbows on knees, fingers interlaced. "She was my sister," he repeated huskily. "We were born and reared in Springfield. Our father was——" He paused again and hunted for a word, then: "A tyrant, a good church-member and according to his lights a Christian, so righteous that he couldn't be religious, so pious that he couldn't find it in him to be kind or merciful. You know the breed. We weren't allowed to play cards or dance, or even go to parties; he was afraid we might play 'kissing games'. We had family prayers each night and morning, and on Sunday weren't allowed to play—my sister's dolls and all my toys were put away each Saturday and not allowed outside the closet till Monday morning. Once when he caught me reading *Moby Dick*—I was a lad of fifteen, too, then—he snatched it from me and threw it in the fire. He'd 'tolerate no novel-reading in a Christian home,' he told me.

"I stood for it; I reckon it was in me from my Puritan ancestors, but Abigail was different. Our grandfather had married an Irish girl—worked her to death and broke her heart with pious devilishness before she was twenty-five—and Abigail took after her. Looked like her, too, they said. Father used to pray with her, pray that she'd be able to 'tear the sinful image of the Scarlet Woman' from her heart and give herself to Jesus. Then he'd beat her for her soul's salvation, praying all the time."

A bitter smile lit up his somber features, and something, some deep-rooted though almost eradicated spirit of revolt, flickered in his eyes a moment. "You can imagine what effect such treatment would have on a high-spirited girl," he added. "When Abby was seventeen she ran away.

"My father cursed her, literally. Stood in the doorway of our home and raised his hands to heaven while he called God's curse upon a wilful, disobedient child."

Again the bitter, twisted smile flickered across his face. "I think his God heard him," he concluded.

"But, *Monsieur*, are we to understand you did not again behold your so unfortunate sister until——" de Grandin paused with upraised brows.

"Oh, yes, I saw her," the young man answered caustically. "She ran away, as I said, but in her case the road of the transgressor was hard. She'd been brought up to call a leg a limb and to think the doctors brought babies in their satchels. She learned the truth before a year had gone.

"I got a note from her one day, telling me she was at a farmhouse outside town and that she was expecting a baby. I was working then and making fairly good money for a youngster, keeping books in a hardware store, but my father took my wages every Saturday night, and I was allowed only a dollar a week from them. I had to put that on the collection plate on Sunday.

"When Abby's letter came I was

almost frantic. I hadn't a nickel I could use, and if I went to my father he would quote something from the Bible about the wages of sin being death, I knew.

"But if you're driven far enough you can usually manage to make plans. I did. I deliberately quit my job at Hoeschler's. Picked a fight with the head bookkeeper, and made 'em discharge me.

"Then I told my father, and though I was almost twenty-one years old, he beat me till I thought I'd drop beneath the torture. But it was all part of my plan, so I gritted my teeth and bore it.

"I'd got the promise of another job before I quit the first one, so I went to work at the new place immediately; but I fooled the old man. My new salary was twenty dollars a week, twice as much as I'd received before, but I told him I had to take a cut in pay, and that they gave me only ten. I steamed the pay envelope open and took out ten dollars, then resealed it and handed it to him with the remaining ten each Saturday. He never knew the difference.

"As quickly as I could I went to see my sister, told her not to worry, and engaged a doctor. I paid him forty dollars on account and signed notes for the balance. Everything was fixed for Abigail to have the proper care.

"He was a pretty little fellow, her baby; pretty and sweet and innocent as though he hadn't been a"—he halted, gagging on the ugly word, then ended lamely—"as if his mother had been married.

"Living was cheaper in those days, and Abby and the baby made out nicely at the farm for 'most two years. I'd had two raises in pay, and turned the increase over to her, and she managed to pick up some spare change at odd work, too, so everything went pretty well——" He stopped again, and the knuckles of his knitted hands showed white and bony as the fingers laced together with increased pressure.

"Yes, my friend, until——" de Grandin prompted softly.

"Till she was taken sick," young Kimble finished. "It was influenza. We'd been pretty hard hit up Springfield way that spring, and Abigail was taken pretty bad. Pneumonia developed, and the doctor didn't hold out much hope to her. Her conscience was troubling her for running out on the old man and on account of the baby, too, I guess. Anyhow, she asked to see a minister.

"He was a young man, just out of the Methodist seminary, with a mouth full of Scriptural quotations and a nose that itched to get in other people's business. When she'd confessed her sin he prayed with her a while, then came hot-foot to the city and spilled the story to my father. Told him erring was human, but forgiveness divine, and that he had a chance to bring the lost sheep back into the fold—typical preacher's cant, you know.

"I was of age, then, but still living home. The old man came to me and taxed me with my perfidy in helping Abby in her life of shameful sin, and—what was worse!—holding back some of my salary from him. Then he began to pray, likening himself to Abraham and me to Isaac, and asking God to give strength to his arm that he might purge me of all sin, and tried to thrash me.

"I said *tried,* gentlemen. The hardware store I worked in had carried a line of buggy-whips, but the coming of the motor car had made them a back number. We hadn't had a call for one in years, and several of the men had brought the old things home as souvenirs. I had one. My father hit me, striking me in the mouth with his clenched fist and bruising my lips till they bled. Then I let him have it. All

the abuse I'd suffered from that sanctimonious old devil since my birth seemed crying out for redress right then, and, by God, it got it! I lashed him with that whip till it broke in my hands, then I beat him with the stock till he cried for mercy. When I say 'cried', I mean just that. He howled and bellowed like a beaten boy, and the tears ran down his face as he begged me to stop flogging him.

"Then I left his house and never entered it again, not even when they held his funeral from it.

"But that didn't help my sister. The old man knew where she was living, and as soon as his bruises were healed he went out there, saw the landlady and told her he was the baby's grandfather and had come to take it home. My sister was too sick to be consulted, so the woman let him take the boy. He took him to an orphanage, and the child died within a month. Diphtheria immunization costs money, and the folks who ran that home—it was proof of a lack of faith in Providence to vaccinate the children for diphtheria, they said; but when you herd two hundred children in a place and one of 'em comes down with the disease, there's bound to be some duplication. Little Arthur died and they were going to bury him in Potter's Field, but I heard of it and claimed the body and gave it decent burial.

"My sister lay half-way between life and death for weeks. Finally she was well enough to ask for her son, and they told her he had gone off with his grandfather. She was almost wild with fear of what the old man might do to the child, but still too weak to travel, and the nervous strain she labored under set her back still further. It was nearly midsummer when she finally went to town.

"She went right to the house and demanded that he give her back her child—told him she'd never asked him for a cent and never would, and every penny that he'd paid out for the little boy would be refunded to him.

"He'd learned his lesson from me, but my sister was a mere woman, weak from recent illness; no need to guard his tongue while he talked with *her*. And so he called her every vile name imaginable and told her that her hope of heaven was gone, for she was living with a parent's curse upon her. Finally he told her that her child was dead and buried in a pauper's grave. He knew that was a lie, but he couldn't forego the joy of hurting her by it.

"She came to me, half crazed with grief, and I did what I could to soothe her. I told her that the old man lied, and knew he lied, and that little Arthur had been buried in Graceland, with a tombstone set above his grave. Then, of course, she wanted to go see the place."

TEARS were falling from the young man's eyes as he concluded: "I never shall forget that afternoon, the last time that I ever saw my little sister living. It was nearly dark when we reached the grave, and she had to kneel to make out the inscription on the stone. Then she went down, like a mother bending by a crib, and whispered to the grass above her baby's face, 'Good-night, little son; good-night and happy dreams; I'll see you early in the morning.' Then realization seemed to come to her. 'Oh, God,' she cried, 'there won't be any morning! Oh, my baby; my little baby boy! They took you from me and killed you, little son—they and their God!'

"And then beside her baby's grave she rose and held her hands up to the sky and cursed the father who begot her and who had done this thing to her; she cursed his church and his religion, cursed his God and all His works, and swore allegiance to the Devil! I'm not a religious man,

gentlemen. I had too big an overdose of it when I was a child, and I've never been in church since I left my father's house; but that wild defiance of hers and her oath of fealty to everything we'd been taught to hate and fear fairly gave me the creeps.

"I never saw her from that night to this. I gave her a hundred dollars, and she took the evening train to Boston, where I understand she got mixed up with all sorts of radical movements. The last I heard of her before I saw her picture in the paper yesterday was when she wrote me from New York saying she'd met a Russian gentleman who was preaching a new religion; one she could subscribe to and accept. I didn't quite understand what it was all about, but I gathered it was some sort of New Thought cult, or something of the kind. Anyway, 'Do What Thou Wilt, This Shall Be the Whole of the Law,' was its gospel, as she wrote it to me."

De Grandin leaned forward, his little, round blue eyes alight with interest and excitement. "Have you, by any chance, a picture of your little nephew, *Monsieur?*" he asked.

"Why, yes, I think so," young Kimble answered. "Here's a snapshot I took of him and Abigail out at the farm the winter before her illness. He was about eight or nine months old then." From an inner pocket he drew a leather wallet and from it took a worn and faded photograph.

"*Morbleu,* I damn knew it; of course, that is the explanation!" de Grandin cried as he looked at the picture. "Await me, my friends, I shall return at once!" he shouted, leaping from his seat and rushing from the room.

In a moment he was back, another picture in his hand. "Compare," he ordered sharply; "put them together, and tell me what it is you see."

Mystified but eager, Renouard, Costello and young Kimble leaned over my shoulder as I laid the photographs side by side upon the coffee table. The picture to the right was the one Kimble furnished us. It showed a woman, younger than the one we knew, and with the light of happiness upon her face, but indisputably the beautiful veiled lady whose tragic death had followed her visit to us. In her arms nestled a pretty, dimpled little boy with dark curling hair clustering in tendrils round his baby ears, and eyes which fairly shone with life and merriment.

The picture to the left was one de Grandin had obtained from the Baptist Home of the little Eastman boy who vanished. Though slightly younger, his resemblance to the other child was startling. Line for line and feature for feature, each was almost the perfect duplicate of the other.

De Grandin tweaked his mustache as he returned the snapshot to young Kimble. "Thank you, *Monsieur,*" he said; "your story has affected us profoundly. Tomorrow, if you will make formal claim to your sister's body, no obstacle to its release will be offered by the coroner, I promise you." Behind the visitor's back he made violent motions to Costello, indicative of our wish to be alone.

The Irishman was quick to take the hint, and in a few minutes had departed with young Mr. Kimble. Half an hour later he rejoined us, a frown of deep perplexity upon his brow.

"I'll bite, Doctor de Grandin, sor," he confessed. "What's it all about?"

12. The Trail of the Serpent

"BUT it is obvious," the little Frenchman answered. "Do not you see it, Renouard, Trowbridge?" he turned his bright bird-like gaze on us.

"I'm afraid not," I replied. "Just what

connection there is between the children's resemblance and——"

"*Ah bah!*" he interrupted. "It is elementary. Consider, if you please. This poor Mademoiselle Abigail, she was hopelessly involved with the Satanists, is it not so?"

"Yes," I agreed. "From what her brother told us, there's not much doubt that the sect with which she was connected is the same one Renouard told us about, but——"

" 'But' be roasted on the grates of hell! Can you think no farther back than the hinder side of your own neck, great stupid one? What did she say when she came rushing to this house at dead of night and begged us for protection? Think, remember, if you can."

"Why, she was raving incoherently; it's rather hard to say that anything she told us was important, but——"

"*Dites*—more of your *sacré* buts! Attend me: She came to us immediately after the small Baptist one had been abducted, and she did declare: 'He was the image of my dear little——' Her statement split upon that word, but in the light of what we now know, the rest is obvious. The little Eastman child resembled her dead baby; she could not bear to see him slaughtered, and cried out in horror at the act. When they persisted in this fiendishness she threatened them with us—with me, to be exact—and ran away to tell us how they might be found. They shot at her, and wounded her, but she won through to us, and though she raved in wild delirium, she told enough to put us on the trail. But certainly. Did she not say, 'Watch for the chalk-signs of the Devil—follow the pointed tridents'? But yes."

He turned to Sergeant Costello and demanded: "And have your men been vigilant, *mon vieux?* Do they keep watch for childish scrawls on house or fence or sidewalk, as I bade?"

Costello eyed him wonderingly. "Sure, they are," he answered. "'Th' whole force has its orders to look out for 'em, though th' saints know what ye're afther wantin' wid 'em when ye find 'em."

"Very good," de Grandin nodded. "Attend me. I have known such things before. You, too, Renouard. Only a word was needed to put me on the trail. That word was furnished by the poor young woman whom they crucified.

"In Europe, when the Satanists would gather for their wicked rites they send some secret message to their members, but never do they tell the place of meeting. No, the message might be intercepted and the police come. What then?

"Upon the walls of houses, on sidewalks, or on fences they draw a crude design of Satan, a foolish, childish thing which will escape notice as the scrawling of naughty little boys, but each of these drawings differs from the others, for whereas one will have the Devil's pitchfork pointing one way, another will point in a different direction. The variation will not be noticed by one who does not know the significance of the scrawls, but to those who know for what they look the pointing tridents are plain as markers on a motor highway. One need but follow the direction of the pointing tridents from picture to picture in order to be finally led right to the door of Satan's temple. Yes; of course. It is so."

"Indubitably," Renouard accorded, with a vehement nod.

"But what's th' little Eastman boy to do wid it?" Costello asked.

"Everything, *parbleu*," de Grandin and Renouard replied in sober chorus.

"It was undoubtlessly for the Black Mass—the Mass of Saint Sécaire—the little one was stolen. Satan is the *singe*

de Dieu—the impudent imitator of God, and in his service is performed a vile parody of the celebration of the mass. The celebrant is, when possible, an unfrocked priest, but if such an one can not be found to do the office, any follower of the Devil may serve.

"In the latter case a wafer already consecrated must be stolen from the monstrance of a church or impiously borne from communion in the mouth of a mock-communicant. Then, robed as a priest, the buffoon who officiates ascends the Devil's altar and mouths the words prescribed in the missal, but reverses all the ritual gestures, kneeling backward to the altar, signing himself with the cross upside down and with his left hand, reciting such prayers as he pleases backward. At the end he holds aloft the sacred Host, but instead of veneration the wretched congregation shrieks out insults, and the elements are then thrown to the ground and trampled underfoot.

"*Ha,* but if a renegade priest can be persuaded to officiate, there is the foulest blasphemy of all, for he still has the words of power and the right to consecrate the elements, and so he says the mass from start to finish. For greater blasphemy the altar is the naked body of a woman, and when the rubric compels the celebrant to kiss the sanctuary, his lips are pressed against the human faircloth. The holy bread is consecrated, likewise the wine, but with the wine there is mingled the lifeblood of a little unbaptized baby boy. The celebrant, the deacon and subdeacon partake of this unholy drink, then share it with the congregation, and also they accept the wafer, but instead of swallowing it in reverence they spit it forth with grimaces of disgust and every foul insult.

"You apprehend? The Mass of Saint Sécaire was duly celebrated on the night poor Mademoiselle Abigail came knocking at our door, and the little Eastman boy had been the victim. You noticed that she wore no clothing, save her outdoor wraps? Was that mere eccentricity? No, *parbleu,* it was evidence; no less. Evidence that she quit that nest of devils as she was and came forthwith to us with information which should lead to their undoing. She had undoubtlessly served as altar cloth that night, my friends, and did not tarry for an instant when she fled—not even long enough to clothe herself. The little victim of that night so much resembled her dead babe that the frozen heart within her was softened all at once, and she became once more a woman with a woman's tender pity, instead of the cold instrument of evil which her pious devil of a father had made her. Certainly. The strayed sheep had come back into the fold."

He tore the end from a blue packet of French cigarettes, set one of the vile-smelling things in his eight-inch amber holder, and thoughtfully ignited it. "Renouard, *mon vieux,*" he said, "I have thought deeply on what you told us. I was reluctant at the first to credit what the evidence disclosed, but now I am convinced. When the small Eastman boy was stolen I could not fit the rough joints of the puzzle to each other. Consider——" He spread his fingers fanwise and checked the items off on them:

"Mademoiselle Alice disappears, and I find evidence that *bulala-gwai* was used. 'What are the meaning of this?' I ask me. 'This snuff-of-sleep, he is much used by savage Africans, but why should he be here? It are a puzzle.'

"Next we find proof that Mademoiselle Alice is the lineal descendant—presumably the last one—of that Devil's priest of olden days whose daughter married David Hume. We also see that a spy of the Yezidees has proved her identity

to his own satisfaction before she is abducted. The puzzle is more mystifying.

"Then we do find poor Madame Hume all dead. The outward evidence says 'suicide!' but I find the hidden proof of murder. Murder by the *roomal* of the *Thags* of India. *Que diable?* The *Thags* are worshippers of Kali, the Black Goddess, who is a sort of female devil, a disreputable half-sister of the Evil One, and in her honor they commit all sorts of murders. But what, I ask to know, are *they* doing here? Already we have Yezidees of Kurdistan, witch-doctors from Central Africa, now *Thags* from India injected in this single case. *Mon Dieu;* I suffer *mal de tête* from thinking, but nowhere can I find one grain of logic in it. *Non,* not anywhere, *cordieu!*

"Anon the little Eastman baby disappears. He is a Baptist; therefore, unbaptized. Time was, I know, when such as he were wanted for the mass of wickedness, but how can he be wanted by the Yezidees? They have no dealings with the Mass of Saint Sécaire, the aping of a Christian rite is not a part of their dark ceremonies; yet here we have *bulala-gwai* again, and *bulala-gwai* was also used when the Yezidees—presumably—stole Mademoiselle Alice from before our very eyes.

" 'Have the Yezidees, whose cult is rooted in obscure antiquity, and dates back far beyond the Christian Era, combined the rites of mediæval Satanists?' I ask. It are not likely, yet what is one to think?

"THEN comes this poor young woman and in her delirium lets fall some words which, in the light of what we know tonight, most definitely connects the stolen baby—the baby stolen even as Mademoiselle Alice was—with the sacrifice of the Mass of Saint Sécaire.

"Now I think of you and what you tell us. How you have found unfortunate young woman, all branded on the breast like Mademoiselle Abigail, all of them once members of the sect of Satanists, each chapter of which unclean cult is led or inspired by one from Russia. And you tell us of this League of Godlessness which is a poisonous fungus spreading through the world from that cellar of unclean abominations we call Russia.

" 'Pains of a most dyspeptic bullfrog,' I inform me, 'I see a little, so small light!' And by that light I read the answer to my riddle. It is this: As business men may take a dozen old and bankrupt enterprises possessed of nothing but old and well-known names, and weld them into one big and modern corporation which functions under a new management, so have these foes of all religion seized on the little, so weak remnants of diabolism and welded them together in a formidable whole. In Africa, you say, the cannibal Leopard Men are on the rampage. The emissaries of Moscow are working with them—have they not brought back the secret of *bulala-gwai* to aid them in their work? In Kurdistan the Yezidees, an obscure sect, scarce able to maintain itself because it is ringed round by Moslems, is suddenly revived, shows new activity. Russia, which prays the world for charity to feed its starving people, can always find capital to stimulate its machinations in other lands. The Arabian gendarmerie find European pilgrims en route to Mount Lalesh, the stronghold of the Yezidees; such things were never known before, but——

" '*Ha,* another link in this so odious chain!' I tell me. 'In Europe and in America the cult of Satanism, almost dead as witchcraft, is suddenly revived in all its awful detail. That it is growing rapidly is proved by the number of renegade clergymen of all faiths, a number never

paralleled before in such short time. From all sides comes evidence of its activities; from London, Paris and Berlin we hear of violated churches; little children—*always boys*—are stolen in increasing numbers and are not held to ransom; they merely disappear. The connection is most obvious. Now we have proof that this vile cult is active in America—right here in Harrisonville, *parbleu!*

"My friends, upon the crumbling ruins of the ancient Yezidee religion and the time-obliterated relics of witchcraft and demonism of the Middle Ages, this Union of the Godless are rearing a monstrous structure designed to crush out all religion with its weight. The trail of the serpent lies across the earth; already his folds are tightening round the world. We must annihilate him, or he will surely strangle us. Yes. Certainly."

"But Alice——" I began. "What connection has she with all this——"

"Much—all—everything," he cut in sharply. "Do you not recall what the secret agents of France have said, that in the East there is talk of a white prophetess who shall raise the Devil's standard and lead his followers on to victory against the Crescent and the Cross? That prophetess is Alice Hume! Consolidated with the demonology of the West, the Devil-Worship of the East will take new force. She has been sought—she has been found, *cordieu!*—and anon she will be taken to some place appointed for her marriage to the Devil; then, with the fanaticism of the Yezidees and the fervor of the atheistic converts as a motivating force, with the promise of the Devil's own begotten son to come eventually as a result of this marriage, with the gold of Soviet Russia and the contributions of wealthy ones who revel in the freedom to do wickedness this new religion gives, they will advance in open warfare. The time to act is now. If we can rescue Mademoiselle Alice and exterminate the leaders of this movement, we may succeed in stemming the tide of hell's rebellion. Failing that——" he spread his hands and raised his shoulders in a shrug of resignation.

"All right," I countered, "how do we go about it? Alice has been gone two weeks—ten days, to be exact—and we haven't the slightest clue to her location. She may be here in Harrisonville, she may have gone to Kurdistan, for all we know. Why aren't we looking for her?"

He gazed at me a moment, then: "I do not lance an abscess till conditions warrant it," he answered. "Neither do we vent our efforts fruitlessly in this case. Mademoiselle Alice is the focal point of all these vile activities. Where she is, there are the leaders of the Satanists, and—where they are, there is she.

"From what Mademoiselle Abigail told us, we may assume there will be other celebrations of the Mass of Wickedness—when we find one of these and raid it, our chances of finding Alice are most excellent. Costello's men are on the lookout, they will inform us when the signs are out; until that time we jeopardize our chances of success by any move we make. I feel—I know—the enemy is concentrated here, but if we go to search for him he will decamp, and instead of the city which we know so well, we shall have to look for him only God knows where. *Alors,* our best activity is inactivity."

"But," I persisted, "what makes you think they're still in the city? Common sense would have warned them to get out before this, you'd think, and——"

"*Non;* you mistake," he told me bluntly. "The safest hiding-place is here. Here they logically should not be, hence this is the last place in which we should be thought to look for them. Again, tem-

porarily at least, this is their headquarters in America. To carry out such schemes as they plan requires money, and much money can be had from converts to their cult. Wealthy men, who might fear to follow nothing but the dictates of their unconscionable consciences, will be attracted by the freedom which their creed permits, and will join them willingly—and willingly contribute to their treasury. It is in hope of further converts that they linger here, as well as to await the blowing over of the search for Alice. When the hue and cry has somewhat abated, when some later outrage claims the public interest, they can slip out all unnoticed. Until that time they are far safer in the shadows of police headquarters than if they took to hasty flight, and——"

Br-r-r-ring! The telephone's sharp warning shut him off.

"Costello? Yes, just a moment," I answered, passing the instrument to the sergeant.

"Yeah, sure—eh? Glory be to God!" Costello said, responding to the message from across the wire. To us:

"Come on, gentlemen; it's time to git our feet against the pavement," he admonished. "Two hours ago some murderin' hoodlums beat up a nursemaid wheelin' a baby home from a visit wid its grandmother, an' run off wid it. An' th' boys have found th' chalk-marks on th' sidewalks. It looks——"

"Non d'un chou-fleur, it looks like action!" de Grandin cried exultantly. "Come, Friend Trowbridge; come, my Renouard, let us go at once, right away, immediately!"

Renouard and he hurried up the stairs while I went to the garage for the car. Two minutes later they joined us, each with a pair of pistols belted to his waist. In addition to the firearms, de Grandin wore a long, curve-bladed Gurkha knife, a wicked, razor-bladed weapon capable of lopping off a hand as easily as a carving-knife takes off the wing of a roast fowl.

Costello was fuming with impatience. "Shtep on it, Doctor Trowbridge, sor," he ordered. "Th' first pitcher wuz at Twenty-eighth an' Hopkins Streets; if ye'll take us there we'll be after follyin' th' trail. I've tellyphoned to have a raidin' party meet us there in fifteen minutes."

"But it is grand, it is immense; it is magnificent, my friend!" de Grandin told Renouard as we slipped through the darkened streets.

"It is superb!" Renouard assured de Grandin.

"Bedad, here's where Ireland declares war on Kur-r-distan!" Costello told them both.

13. Inside the Lines

A LARGE, black and very shiny limousine was parked at the curb near the intersection of Twenty-eighth and Hopkins Streets, and toward it Costello led the way when we halted at the corner. The vehicle had all the earmarks of hailing from some high-class mortician's garage, and this impression was heightened by a bronze plate displayed behind the windshield with the legend FUNERAL CAR in neat block letters. But there was nothing funereal—except perhaps potentially—about the eight passengers occupying the tonneau. I recognized Officers Hornsby, Gilligan and Schultz, each with a canvas web-belt decorated with a service revolver and nightstick buckled outside his blouse, and with a vicious-looking submachine gun resting across his knees. Five others, similarly belted, but equipped with fire axes, boathooks and slings of tear-bombs, huddled out of sight of casual passers-by on the seats of the car. "Camouflage," Costello told us with a grin, pointing to the funeral sign; then:

"All set, Hornsby? Got ever'thing, axes, hooks, tear-bombs, an——"

"All jake, sir. Got th' works," the other interrupted. "Where's th' party?"

The sergeant beckoned the patrolman loitering at the corner. "Where is it?" he demanded.

"Right here, sir," the man returned, pointing to a childish scrawl on the cement sidewalk.

We examined it by the light of the street lamp. Unless warned of its sinister connotation, no one would have given the drawing a second glance, so obviously was it the mark of mischievous but not exceptionally talented children. A crudely sketched figure with pot-belly, triangular head and stiffly jointed limbs was outlined on the sidewalk in white chalk of the sort every schoolboy pilfers from the classroom. Only a pair of parentheses sprouting from the temples and a pointed beard and mustache indicated the faintest resemblance to the popular conception of the Devil, and the implement the creature held in its unskilfully drawn hand might have been anything from a fishing-pole to a pitchfork. Nevertheless, there was one fact which struck us all. Instead of brandishing the weapon overhead, the figure pointed it definitely toward Twenty-ninth Street.

De Grandin's slender nostrils twitched like those of a hunting dog scenting the quarry as he bent above the drawing. "We have the trail before us," he whispered. "Come, let us follow it. *Allons!*"

"Come on, youse guys; folly us, but don't come too close unless we signal," Costello ordered the men waiting in the limousine.

Down Hopkins Street, shabby, down-at-the-heel thoroughfare that it was, we walked with all the appearance of nonchalance we could muster, paused at Twenty-ninth Street and looked about. No second guiding figure met our eye.

"Dame!" de Grandin swore. *"C'est singulier.* Can we have—*ah, regardez-vous, mes amis!"* The tiny fountain-pen searchlight he had swung in an ever-widening circle had picked out a second figure, scarcely four inches high, scribbled on the red-brick front of a vacant house. The trident in the demon's hand directed us down Twenty-ninth Street toward the river.

A moment only we stopped to study it, and all of us were impressed at once with one outstanding fact; crudely drawn as it was, the second picture was a duplicate in miniature of the first, the same technique, if such a word could be applied to such a scrawl, was evident in every wavering line and faulty curve of the small picture. *"Morbleu,"* de Grandin murmured, "he was used to making these, the one who laid this trail. This is no first attempt."

"Mais non," Renouard agreed.

"Looks that way," I acquiesced.

"Sure," said Costello. "Let's git goin'."

Block after block we followed the little sprawling figures of the Devil scrawled on sidewalk, wall or fence, and always the pointing tridents led us toward the poorer, unkempt sections of the city. At length, when we had left all residential buildings and entered a neighborhood of run-down factories and storehouses, de Grandin raised his hand to indicate a halt.

"We would better wait our reinforcements," he cautioned; "there is too great an opportunity for an ambuscade in this deserted quarter, and—*ah, par la barbe d'un poisson rouge!"* he cried. "We are in time, I think. Observe him, if you please."

Fifty or a hundred yards beyond us a figure moved furtively. He was a shadow

of a man, sliding noiselessly and without undue movement, though with surprizing speed, through the little patch of luminance cast by a flickering gas street-lamp. Also he seemed supremely alert, perceptive and receptive with the sensitiveness of a wild animal of the jungle stalking wary prey. The slightest movement of another in the semi-darkness near him would have needed to be more shadow-silent than his own to escape him.

"This," remarked Renouard, "will bear investigating. Let me do it, my Jules. I am accustomed to this sort of hunting." With less noise than a swimmer dropping into a darkened stream he disappeared in the shadow of a black-walled warehouse, to emerge a moment later half-way down the block where a street lamp stained the darkness with its feeble light. Then he melted into the shadow once again.

We followed, silently as possible, lessening the distance between Renouard and ourselves as quickly as we could, but making every effort at concealment.

Renouard and the shadow-man came together at the dead-end of a cross-street where the oil-stained waters of the river lapped the rotting piles.

"Hands up, my friend!" Renouard commanded, emerging from the darkness behind his quarry with the suddenness of a magic-lantern view thrown on a screen. "I have you under cover; if you move, your prayers had best be said!" He advanced a pace, pressing the muzzle of his heavy pistol almost into the other's neck, and reached forward with his free hand to feel, with a trained policeman's skill, for hidden weapons.

The result was surprizing, though not especially pleasing. Like an inflated ball bounced against the floor, Renouard rose in the air, flew over the other's shoulder and landed with a groan of suddenly-expelled breath against the cobblestones, flat upon his back. More, the man whose skill at jujitsu accomplished his defeat straightened like a coiled steel spring suddenly released, drew an impressively large automatic pistol and aimed it at the supine Frenchman. "Say your prayers, if you know any, you——" he began, but Costello intervened.

Lithe and agile as a tiger, for all his ponderous bulk, the Irishman cleared the space between them with a single leap and swung his blackjack in a devastating arc. The man sagged at the knees and sank face-forward to the street, his pistol sliding from his unnerved hand and lying harmless in the dust beside him.

"That's that," remarked the sergeant. "Now, let's have a look at this felly."

He was a big man, more lightly built, but quite as tall as the doughty Costello, and as the latter turned him over, we saw that though his hair was iron-gray, his face was young, and deeply tanned. A tiny, dark mustache of the kind made popular by Charlie Chaplin and British subalterns during the war adorned his upper lip. His clothes were well cut and of good material, his boots neatly polished, and his hands, one of which was ungloved, well cared for—obviously a person with substantial claims to gentility, though probably one lacking in the virtues of good citizenship, I thought.

Costello bent to loose the buttons of the man's dark overcoat, but de Grandin interposed a quick objection. *"Mais non, mon sergent,"* he reproved, "our time is short. Place manacles upon his hands and give him into custody. We can attend to him at leisure; at present we have more important pots upon the fire."

"Right ye are, sor," the Irishman agreed with a grin, locking a pair of handcuffs on the stunned man's wrists. He

raised his hand in signal, and as the limousine slid noiselessly alongside: "Keep an eye on this bur-rd, Hornsby," he ordered. "We'll be wantin' to give 'im th' wor-rks at headquarters—afther we git through wid this job, y'understand."

Officer Hornsby nodded assent, and we returned to our queer game of hare and hounds.

IT MIGHT have been a half-hour later when we came to our goal. It was a mean building in a mean street. The upper floors were obviously designed for manufacturing, for half a dozen signs proclaimed that desirable lofts might be rented from as many agents, "Alterations Made to Suit Tenant for a Term of Years." The ground floor had once been occupied by an emporium dispensing spirituous, malt and vinous liquors, and that the late management had regarded the law of the land with more optimism than respect was evident from the impressive padlock on the door and the bold announcement that the place was "Closed by Order of U. S. District Court."

Beside the door of what had been the family entrance in days gone by was a sketch of Satan, his trident pointing upward—the first of the long series of guiding sketches to hold the spear in such position. Undoubtedly the meeting-place was somewhere in the upper portion of the empty-seeming building, but when we sought an entrance every door was closed and firmly barred. All, indeed, were furnished with stout locks on the outside. The evidence of vacancy was plain and not to be disputed, whatever the Satanic scrawl might otherwise imply.

"Looks like we're up agin a blank wall, sor," Costello told de Grandin. "This place is empty as a bass drum—probably ain't had a tenant since th' prohibition men got sore 'cause someone cut off their protection money an' slapped a padlock on th' joint."

De Grandin shook his head in positive negation. "The more it seems deserted the more I am convinced we are arrived at the right place," he answered. "These locks, do they look old?"

"H'm," the sergeant played his searchlight on the nearest lock and scratched his head reflectively. "No, sor, I can't say they do," he admitted. "If they'd been here for a year—an' th' joint's been shut almost that long—they ought to show more weather-stain, but what's that got to do wid——"

"Ah bah," de Grandin interrupted, "to be slow of perception is the policeman's prerogative, but you abuse the privilege, my friend! What better means of camouflage than this could they desire? The old locks are removed and new ones substituted. Each person who is bidden to the rendezvous is furnished with a key; he follows where the pointing spears of Satan lead, opens the lock and enters. *Voilà tout!"*

"Wallah me eye," the Irishman objected. "Who's goin' to lock up afther 'im? If——"

A sudden scuffle in the dark, a half-uttered, half-suppressed cry, and the sound of flesh colliding violently with flesh cut him off.

"Here's a bird I found layin' low acrost th' street, sir," Officer Hornsby reported, emerging from the darkness which surrounded us, forcing an undersized individual before him. One of his hands was firmly twisted in the prisoner's collar, the other was clamped across his mouth, preventing outcry.

"I left th' gang in th' car up by th' entrance to th' alley," he continued, "an' come gum-shoein' down to see if I wuz needed, an' this gink must 'a' seen me buttons, for he made a pass at me an' missed, then started to let out a squawk,

but I choked 'im off. Looks like he wuz planted as a lookout for th' gang, an'——"

"Ah?" de Grandin interrupted. "I think the answer to your question is here, my sergeant." To Hornsby:

"You say that he attempted an assault?"

"I'll tell th' cock-eyed world," the officer replied. "Here's what he tried to ease into me." From beneath his blouse he drew a short, curve-bladed dagger, some eight inches in length, its wicked keen-edged blade terminating in a vicious vulture's-beak hook. "I'd 'a' made a handsome-lookin' corpse wid that between me ribs," he added grimly.

De Grandin gazed upon the weapon, then the captive. "The dagger is from Kurdistan," he declared. "This one"—he turned his back contemptuously on the prisoner—"I think that he is Russian, a renegade Hebrew from the Black Sea country. I know his kind, willing to sell his ancient, honorable birthright and the god of his fathers for political preferment. What further did he do, if anything?"

"Well, sir, he kind of overreached hisself when he drove at me wid th' knife—I reckon I must 'a' seen it comin', or *felt* it, kind of. Anyhow, he missed me, an' I cracked 'im on the wrist wid me night-stick, an' he dropped his sticker an' started to yell. Not on account o' th' pain, sir—it warn't that sort o' yell—but more as if he wuz tryin' to give th' tip-off to 'is pals. Then I claps me hand acrost 'is trap an' lets 'im have me knuckles. He flings sumpin—looked like a bunch o' keys, as near as I could make out—away an'—well, here we are, sir.

"What'll I do wid 'im, Sergeant?" He turned inquiringly to Costello.

"Put th' joolry on 'im an' slap 'im in th' wagon wid th' other guy," the sergeant answered.

"I got you," Hornsby replied, saluting and twisting his hand more tightly in the prisoner's collar. "Come on, bozo," he shook the captive by way of emphasis, "you an' me's goin' bye-bye."

"And now, my sergeant, for the strategy," de Grandin announced. "Renouard, Friend Trowbridge and I shall go ahead. Too many entering at once would surely advertise our coming. The doors are locked and that one threw away the keys. He had been well instructed. To search for them would take up too much time, and time is what we can not well afford to waste. Therefore you will await us here, and when I blow my whistle you will raid the place. And oh, my friend, do not delay your coming when I signal! Upon your speed may rest a little life. You understand?"

"Perfectly, sor," Costello answered. "But how're ye goin' to crack th' crib—git in th' joint, I mean?"

De Grandin grinned his elfish grin. "Is it not beautiful?" he asked, drawing something from the inside pocket of his sheepskin reefer. It was a long instrument of tempered steel, flattened at one end to a thin but exceedingly tough blade.

The Irishman took it in his hand and swung it to and fro, testing its weight and balance. "Bedad, Doctor de Grandin, sor," he said admiringly, "what an elegant burglar was spoilt when you decided to go straight!"

De Grandin motioned to Renouard and me, and crept along the base of the house wall. Arrived at a soiled window, he inserted the thin edge of his burglar tool between the upper and lower casings and probed and twisted it experimentally. The window had been latched, but a little play had been left between the sashes. Still, it took us but a moment to determine that the casings, though loose, were securely fastened.

"Allons," de Grandin murmured, and we crept to another window. This, too, defied his efforts, as did the next two which we tested, but success awaited us at our fifth trial. Persistence was rewarded, and the questing blade probed and pushed with gentle persuasion till the rusty latch snapped back and we were able to push up the sash.

INSIDE the storehouse all was darker than a cellar, but by the darting ray of de Grandin's flashlight we finally descried a flight of dusty stairs spiraling upward to a lightless void. We crept up these, found ourselves in a wide and totally empty loft, then, after casting about for a moment, found a second flight of stairs and proceeded to mount them.

Half-way up the ascent de Grandin's whispered admonition brought us to a halt. "Observe!" he ordered almost soundlessly. Impressed in the thick layer of dust which overlaid the stairway like a carpet were the distinct prints of several pairs of feet—fresh prints, too, for no new coat of dust lay in them.

"The trail is warm—*pardieu,* it is hot!" he murmured. "Come, my friends, forward, and for your lives, no noise!"

The stairway terminated in a little walled-off space, once used as a business office by the manufactory which had occupied the loft's main space, no doubt. Now it was hung with draperies of deep-red velours realistically embroidered with the figure of a strutting peacock some six or eight feet high. "Melek Taos—the Peacock Spirit of Evil, Satan's viceroy upon earth," de Grandin told us in a whisper as we gazed upon the image which his flashing searchlight showed. "Now do you stand close beside me and have your weapons ready, if you please. We may have need of them."

Across the little intervening space he tiptoed, put aside the ruddy curtains and tapped timidly on the door thus disclosed. Silence answered his summons, but as he repeated the hail with soft insistence the door swung inward a few inches and a hooded figure peered cautiously through the opening.

"Who comes?" the sentinel whispered. "And why have ye not the mystic knock?"

"The knock, you say?" de Grandin answered almost soundlessly. *"Morbleu,* I damn think that we have one—do you care for it?" Swiftly he swung the steel tool with which he had forced the windows and caught the hooded porter fairly on the cranium.

"Assist me, if you please," he ordered in a whisper, catching the man as he toppled forward and easing him to the floor. "So. Off with his robe, while I insure his future harmlessness."

With the waist-cord from the porter's costume he bound the man's hands and ankles, then rose, donned the red cassock and tiptoed through the door.

"Ss-s-st!" His low, sharp hiss came through the dark, and we followed him into the tiny anteroom. A row of pegs was ranged around the wall, and from them hung hooded gowns of dark-red cloth, similar to that worn by the sentinel. Obedient to de Grandin's signaled order, Renouard and I arrayed ourselves in gowns, pulled the hoods well forward to obscure our features, and, hands clasped before us and demurely hidden in our flowing sleeves, crept silently across the vestibule, paused a moment at the swinging curtains muffling the door, then, with bowed heads, stepped forward in de Grandin's wake.

We were in the chapel of the Devil-Worshippers.

The terrible Black Mass, the Mass of St. Secaire, with the live body of a beautiful woman as the altar, is witnessed by de Grandin in the thrilling chapters of this story in next month's WEIRD TALES, which will appear April 1st.

Conjure Bag

By KADRA MAYSI

An eery story of the Black Belt of South Carolina—a tale of voodoo and death

THE community health nurse had summoned the local doctors to a conclave. She was a very business-like and modern person, and, in spite of the fact that their M. D. ranked her R. N., they stood a bit in awe of her. They found her at her desk in the little brick health office—a trimly dainty but decidedly cross little nurse, with crackling linen skirts and crackling tongue.

Doctor Serris came in last. He dreaded the interview. For forty peaceful years he had practised in the county, bringing physical and mental healing to both white and black. The country people loved him; but he was well aware that this crisp young nurse considered him "old fogy." Moreover, he knew for a certainty that the interview had to do with old Mengo Gum.

"I've stood him as long as I can," Miss Cuppie was saying. "He has made my work harder by his 'root doctor' practises. He prejudices the rural people against me and doses them with his nasty concoctions. Some of his patients have even gone so far as to refuse to let me in a house. All this is bad enough; but now he has done worse. I must beg of you to take steps."

Doctor Serris had taken the chair nearest the door. He said nothing. But Doctor Kinglandsmith and Doctor Crowder spoke together. Kinglandsmith was very young and he was, openly, laughing.

"What has old Mengo done now? And what steps can we take?"

"You can put him in jail for practising medicine without a license," Miss Cuppie answered sharply.

Doctor Serris sighed. Put Mengo in jail?—harmless old Mengo who lived on the edge of Cypress Swamp and eked out a living by planting his little field, cutting wood, raising chickens, and—and selling the country people bottles of home-made lotions and cough sirups! He had no idea of making charges against the old negro, and he knew that his colleagues would not do it either. But why must this starched little nurse stir up trouble? The old man was harmless.

Kinglandsmith was laughing.

"Well, what has he done, Miss Cuppie?"

"He's simply coining money in this whooping cough epidemic. Ignorant people still send for him. He takes a jar full of some dirty liquid, covers its top with a piece of cloth, pokes a hole in this, and makes the patient inhale, cough, and expectorate through that hole. Then he removes the cloth, shows a lizard in the jar, and tells them that all their trouble has been caused by a lizard in their stomach and that the magic medicine in his jar has brought it up and they are cured. And," added Miss Cuppie more crisply than before, "he gets five dollars a visit!"

Crowder whistled.

"By gosh," he said admiringly, "why can't *we* do it? We only charge two-and-a-half and, half the time, can't collect that!"

"Doctor Crowder!" crackled Miss Cuppie. "You speak as if you condoned such

"The explosion awakened him and released his hands from the bed's footboard."

things! Do you know that he treated the Tumblestone children—*your patients*—yesterday?"

"I didn't know it," Crowder owned. Then he added maliciously:

"But, when I saw them this morning, they were both coughing less."

Doctor Serris spoke for the first time. He had always been a peacemaker, and it looked as though Cuppie and Crowder might come to blows.

"Doctor Crowder only means, Miss Cuppie, that most cures are partially dependent upon the patients' faith."

"To have faith in a dirty old negro! An ignorant, superstitious voodoo doctor! I can not understand it—or your toleration of it!"

Serris had learned toleration in forty years of service in the Black Belt of South Carolina. This crisp young nurse was not long out of training. But she was capable, in her dominating way; and she was pretty, with her high color, her neat figure, and her lacquer-smooth brown bob. She shook it emphatically, stabbed her chart book with a manicured forefinger, and went on.

"I ask you to do something about this impostor. He is abed today, claiming that somebody has 'conjured' him. I've been to see him and blessed him out—

for both conjuring and being conjured. I told him that, if he didn't stop all his hocus-pocus, his case could be handled by law!"

Serris said quietly: "Better not scold and excite him. He has a real enough ailment—an advanced case of myocarditis. I'll go see him, and I'll tell him to stop that lizard trick."

But the health nurse was not mollified. She saw no humor in the situation. Her cheeks still bright with anger, she drew on the little blue hat, flung the dark blue cape across her shoulders, got into her car, and started out on the Hawks' Bay road.

DRIVING in the opposite direction, toward Cypress Swamp, Doctor Serris smiled and sighed. Forty years of country practise had taught him many odd gradations between right and wrong. The girl was capable and was doing good work in the country. He did not blame her. But neither could he blame the Afro-American who, with one century of Christianity between him and eons of a Dark Continent, now and then forgot his newly adopted religion and medicine and did a bit of bootlegging with old gods of his fathers.

Mengo lived alone in a log cabin behind a high stockade fence. Within it scratched a flock of black chickens, and three large black mongrels guarded the door and growled menacingly until recalled by a faint voice within. In the cotton field behind the house grazed a shaggy, spavined old black horse. As Serris went up the low, rickety steps, he noted for the hundredth time the harmless little "charms" hung out as mute prayers for good luck: the eggshells strung in long festoons around a window innocent of glass, the rusty horseshoe nailed above the entrance—nailed upside down "to keep de witches out."

Mengo, black as fur or feather of the beasts he kept and loved, lay beneath a patchwork quilt in the half-darkened room.

Serris saw at once that the old negro was very ill. The black face shone with dusky grayness in the light from the open door.

"Mengo, old fellow, why didn't you send for me before?"

" 'Tain' no use dis time, Boss. Dis time Ah bin cunjured!"

"Nonsense, Mengo—stuff and nonsense! You may fool idiots that you make them spit up lizards; but *you* aren't stupid. You can't fool yourself—or me."

Mengo smiled faintly. He did not lack humor. Then that set grayness stiffened his face again. He reached beneath the pillow and drew out something that resembled a drowned mouse.

"Ah fin' dis-yer cunjur-bag, Boss-Doctor. Ah fin' um een muh well."

"Well, it can't hurt you—unless the scoundrel poisoned the water."

"Look een um, Boss."

Doctor Serris took the thing across to the window, flung out the board shutter, and laid it on the sill, It was a little bag, hardly more than four inches square, made of dirty white cloth and pinned shut by a twisted nail. He loosed this and spilled the contents: several inches of whitened bone, a tuft of black hair tied with thread, the wrinkled, slippery claw of a toad, a wet white cock's feather, soiled to brown, and a little silver dime.

"You don't believe in this, Mengo. Take the dime and buy tobacco."

But he could not laugh it off. The face on the pillow was darkly ashen. Serris made him as comfortable as possible. That was all that he could do.

"You're a kind of a doctor, yourself, Mengo. Can't you break spells?"

A weary shake of the woolly head.

"Boss-Doctor, w'ite man put dat cun-

jur on me. Dat's de wus' cunjur dey is."

Serris knew—as the Southerner does—that even as the white man can rise above the black he can descend below him.

"You've got too much sense, Mengo, to let any poor white trash frighten you. Don't you know a counter-conjure?"

He realized that worry would be fatal to that heart. To him the "cunjur-bag" was a joke—but a joke that could kill his patient.

"Ah knows um, Boss." But the voice faltered!

"What is it?"

"Yo' tek dat dime 'e sen' yuh, Boss" (the deadly earnestness of the tone!) "an' yo' bile um een bilin' water. Yo' draws a picter on a shingle—picter ob man dat sen' de cunjur. Den yo' cuts a hole een de shingle an' puts dime een dat hole. Yo' teks yo' gun—an' shoots de dime——"

"And then?"

"Bullet boun' tuh kill de man dat sen' de cunjur, Boss. Bullet boun' tuh go right tru' 'e heart. But—bullet boun' tuh go tru' *yo' h'art fus'*—befo' 'e reach um."

Serris did not laugh. He patted the horny black hand.

"Well, then, leave it to me, Mengo. Don't worry. I'll make you well. I'm going to send Aunt Phibby to take care of you tonight; and I'll look in on you again, pretty late in the evening."

He stopped at the next cabin to engage the old mauma who acted as practical nurse; then he turned homeward. He would have supper, finish the few visits left, and see the old root doctor last. He was truly distressed about his faithful old black friend. Excitement was, of all things, the very worst thing for a cardiac case.

At the village pharmacy, where he stopped for messages, an excited clerk rushed out to the car.

"Doctor, have you heard anything of Miss Cuppie? Her coupé was found, two hours ago, jammed against a tree on the Hawks' Bay road! Her cloak was in it, but nobody knows what has become of her!"

Black night—moonless, starless. Men in posses—men in groups—men in pairs. Men hunting the little health nurse through thirty square miles of semi-tropical and almost impenetrable South Carolina swamp!

It was midnight when Doctor Serris got back to Mengo's cabin. He had delayed to do what he could to further the search. Then he had taken a list of his colleagues' calls, while they—young enough to do what he could not—joined the hunt. It was assuming colossal proportions as volunteers from other counties poured in.

Midnight now—moonless, starless. And a girl who had, presumably, met with foul play, missing somewhere within that blackness of swamp and night!

Old Mengo was lying still, breathing laboriously, while Aunt Phoebe squatted over the fire and brewed herself black tea of "yarbs". Doctor Serris told her of the nurse's disappearance, asking whether she knew of any ill-feeling incurred by the latter from black or white. The old woman shook her head; but, before she could mumble a negative, Mengo roused. He raised himself on his elbows.

"Sis Phibby, gimme dat t'ing wrop up een paper on de shelf."

He took it from her, shakily unfolding layer after layer of newspaper until he showed a little silver vanity case.

"Nurse-Lady drop um w'en 'e bin yere tuh see me dis mawnin'—same Nurse-Lady dat tell me 'e gwine hab de law on me 'caze Ah bin root doctor—an Ah wrop um up an' sabe um furruh. Lemme jis' look een 'e face-glass, Boss, an' Ah kin tell yuh jis' way 'e bin."

Doctor Serris felt a bit chilly. He glanced back at the door, but it was closed. Mengo was holding the compact at arm's length, gazing steadily into its little mirrors. He was silent for several minutes, then began chanting eerily. Stooping, witch-like, over the fire, old Phoebe moaned accompaniment.

Doctor Serris was icy cold, though the door was shut and fire burning. He stood at the foot of the wooden bed while the weird half-song, half-mutter, rose and fell. Suddenly it ceased.

"Ah see w'ite gal! Ah—biggin—fuh see um!"

The old woman's minor wail quavered like the howl of a beast. Serris, holding onto the bed, felt himself trembling from head to foot. Mengo was killing himself. This was death to a heart case. But when Serris tried to move he could not. His hands were locked on the pine footboard. Was he, too, hypnotized? For Mengo was hypnotizing himself by gazing into the vanity mirrors. He should never have let the old negro start. But he had seen strange things—things more than strange—in forty years' practise in the Black Belt! He had realized at once what the root doctor was going to do—was going to gaze intently at the bright object, concentrating upon its owner. And because he, Serris, had seen things more than strange, he had held back and let him try. Now he, himself, was hypnotized. He was party to it.

Mengo was chanting guttural phrases. Although the doctor easily understood the Gullah dialect of the coast negroes, he did not understand a word of this. Guttural phrases—phrases of African incantation handed down from father to son by the doctor-priests of a Dark Continent. Old Phoebe recognized them. She swayed her body and howled.

Mengo had stopped chanting. There was bloody foam on his lips. The one-room hut darkened and brightened as the red flame rose and fell.

Out of the silence the root doctor spoke. His voice was not his own.

"W'ite lady—bin een—house like dis. But—house full—licker jar—house een—swamp. Two w'ite mens—take she dere. One stay—by house. Tudder—gone way. W'ite man—dat stay—creep up—to do'. W'ite lady—done lock—do' eenside."

Serris thought: Bootleggers—of course! Cuppie had blundered upon evidence and been detained by them in self-protection. But, it was life and death! They would not hesitate to kill her if they thought she would inform upon them; and she was just the kind to defy them—crisply—foolishly.

The one-room hut darkened and brightened as the flame rose and fell. The sing-song, disembodied voice took up its weird monologue.

"W'ite man—fin' do' lock. Now 'e done crope up to window. 'E tu'n 'e haid. Ah see 'e face!—Jedus Chris'! Jedus Chris'—him bin Mal Welkin! Him bin same man sen' de cunjur!"

Doctor Serris stood as if frozen, but old Phoebe obeyed Mengo. She boiled the dime from the conjure bag in the kettle over the fire. Mengo was drawing with charcoal on a shingle she had fetched.

It seemed quite natural to Serris. He was seeing that skulking form in the swamp—that degenerate white fallen low enough to try the negro's own black arts upon one against whom he had a grudge—that renegade who would molest a woman in his power! It seemed quite natural to Serris—for he knew now that, if somebody could not save Cuppie immediately, it would be far kinder not to save her at all. He watched Mengo fit the tiny silver circle in the shingle, saw

old Phoebe lean it on the window and hand the root doctor his gun.

The explosion awakened him—released his hands from the bed's footboard. The room was full of black powder smoke. Shutter and shingle were splintered to bits. Mengo lay dead—black fingers curved around gunstock and trigger.

SERRIS never remembered how he got home that night; but he remembered sitting in his office just at dawn—for there had been no use to go to bed or try to sleep. He had been sitting in his office, writing old Mengo's death certificate by a paling electric desk lamp, when Kinglandsmith had burst into the room.

"We found her, Doctor—found her—just an hour ago. She ran into bootleggers loading a truck, and they locked her in the shanty where they stored their stuff. One was fairly decent—wanted to let her go—but, when he went off, the other tried to break in and attack her. His partner must have come back and shot him. He was climbing in the window when Cuppie heard the shot. And who do you think he was?—That brass ankle, Mal Welkin! It's a good riddance, too! We found him—doubled over the sill—shot right through the heart. And we won't worry to ask any questions about who his partner was!"

The electric globe was paling. Serris had signed the form. He looked calmly at Kinglandsmith—at the boy's muddy clothes and unshaven face. For he had known it all along. He had known, hours before they did, that Welkin was dead and Cuppie was safe. He blotted the certificate on the desk before him and nodded at his boyish successor, wondering what forty years of service in the Black Belt would do to him.

"You're right," he said. "There'd be no use—no use to ask any questions. And, by the way, the root doctor died. He died last night. It was his heart."

The Gorgon

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A thrill-tale of the snaky-locked Medusa and a fantastic adventure in modern London

> Yet it is less the horror than the grace
> Which turns the gazer's spirit into stone.
> —*Shelley.*

I HAVE no reason to expect that any one will believe my story. If it were another's tale, probably I should not feel inclined to give it credence myself. I tell it herewith, hoping that the mere act of narration, the mere shaping of this macabre day-mare adventure into words will in some slight measure serve to relieve my mind of its execrable burden. There have been times when only a hair's-breadth has intervened betwixt myself and the seething, devil-ridden world of madness; for the hideous knowledge, the horror-blackened memo-

ries which I have carried so long, were never meant to be borne by the human intellect.

A singular confession, no doubt, for one who has always been a connoisseur of horrors. The deadly, the malign and baleful things that lurk in the labyrinth of existence have held for me a fascination no less potent than unholy. I have sought them out and looked upon them as one who sees the fatal eyes of the basilisk in a mirror; or as a savant who handles corrosive poisons in his laboratory with mask and gloves. Never did they have for me the least hint of personal menace, since I viewed them with the most impersonal detachment. I have investigated many clues of the spectral, the ghastly, the bizarre, and many mazes of terror from which others would have recoiled with caution or trepidation. . . . But now I could wish that there were one lure which I had not followed, one labyrinth which my curiosity had not explored. . . .

More incredible than all else, perhaps, is the very fact that the thing occurred in Twentieth Century London. The sheer anachronism and fabulosity of the happening has made me doubt the verities of time and space; and ever since then I have been as one adrift on starless seas of confusion, or roaming through unmapped dimensions. Never have I been quite able to re-orient myself, to be altogether sure that I have not gone astray in other centuries, in other lands than those declared by the chronology and geography of the present. I have continual need of modern crowds, of glaring lights, of laughter and clangor and tumult to reassure me; and always I am afraid that such things are only an insubstantial barrier; that behind them lies the realm of ancient horror and immemorial malignity of which I have had this one abominable glimpse. And always it seems to me that the veil will dissolve at any moment, and leave me face to face with an ultimate Fear.

There is no need to detail the events that brought me to London. It should be enough to say that I had endured a great grief, the death of the only woman whom I had loved. I travelled as others have done, to forget, to seek distraction among the novelties of foreign scenes; and I tarried long in London, because its gray and mist-enfolded vastness, its ever-varying throngs, its inexhaustible maze of thoroughfares and lanes and houses, were somehow akin to oblivion itself, and offered more of refuge from my sorrow than brighter cities had given.

I do not know how many weeks or months I lingered in London. Time meant little to me, except as an ordeal to be undergone; and I recked not of its disposal. It is hard to remember what I did or where I went; for all things were blurred in a negligible monotone.

However, my meeting with the old man is clear as any present impression—and perhaps clearer. Among the faint recollections of that period, it is etched as with some black acid. I can not recall the name of the street on which I saw him; but it was not far from the Strand, and was full of a late afternoon crowd, beneath a heaven of high fog through which the sun had not penetrated for days or weeks.

I was strolling idly along, amid hurrying faces and figures that meant no more to me than the featureless heavens or the uniform shops. My thoughts were idle, empty, immaterial; and in those days (since I had been brought face to face with an all-too-real horror) I had relinquished my search for the darker mysteries of existence. I was without forewarning, without anticipation of anything but the daily drabness of the London streets and people. Then, from that

anonymous welter of humanity, the man stood before me with the terrifying suddenness of an apparition; and I could not have sworn from which direction he had come.

He was not unusual in frame or stature, apart from the erectness with which he carried himself notwithstanding his extreme and manifest age. Nor were his garments uncommon, aside from the fact that they too were excessively old, and seemed to exhale an air of greater antiquity than was warranted even by their cut and fabric. It was not these, but the man's visage, which electrified all my drowsy faculties into a fascinated and awe-struck attention. With the mortal pallor of his deeply wrinkled features, like graven ivory, with his long, curling hair and beard that were white as moon-touched vapor, with his eyes that glowed in their hollow sockets like the coals of demon fires in underworld caverns, he would have made a living model for Charon, the boatman who ferries the dead of Hades across the ebon silence of the Styx. He seemed to have stepped from an age and land of classic mythology, into the teeming turmoil of that London street; and the strange impression which he made upon me was in no wise modified by his habiliments. I paid so little attention to these that I could not remember their details afterward; though I think that their predominant color was a black that had begun to assume the green of time, and suggested the plumage of some sinister bird. My astonishment at the appearance of this singular old man was increased when I saw that no one else in the throng seemed to notice anything unusual or peculiar about him; but that all were hastening on their way with no more, at most, than the off-hand scrutiny which one would give to some aged beggar.

As for me, I had paused in my strolling, petrified with an instant fascination, an immediate terror which I could not analyze or define. The old man, too, had paused; and I saw that we were both a little withdrawn from the current of the crowd, which passed so obliviously, intent on its own fears and allurements. Evidently realizing that he had caught my attention, and perceiving the effect which he had upon me, the old man stepped nearer, smiling with a hint of some horrible malevolence, some nameless antique evil. I would have drawn back; but I was bereft of the power of movement. Standing at my very side, and searching me with the gaze of his coal-like orbs, he said to me in a low tone which could not have been overheard by any of the passers-by:

"I can see that you have a taste for horror. The dark and awful secrets of death, the equally dreadful mysteries of life, allure your interest. If you care to come with me, I will show you something which is the quintessence of all horror. You shall gaze on the head of Medusa with its serpent locks—that very head which was severed by the sword of Perseus."

I was startled beyond measure by the strange words, uttered in accents which seemed to be heard by the mind rather than the ear. Somehow—unbelievable as this will seem—I have never been quite sure in what language he spoke: it may have been English; or it may have been Greek, which I know perfectly. The words penetrated my understanding without leaving any definite sense of their actual sound or linguistic nature. And of the voice itself, I know only that it was such as might issue from the very lips of Charon. It was guttural, deep, malign, with an echo of profound gulfs and sunless grottoes.

Of course, my reason strove to dismiss the unaccountable feelings and ideas that had surged upon me. I told myself that it was all imagination; that the man was probably some queer sort of madman, or else was a mere trickster, or a showman who took this method of drumming up custom. But his aspect and his words were of necromantic strangeness; they seemed to promise in a superlative degree the weirdness and bizarrerie which I had sought in former time, and of which, so far, I had found little hint in London. So I answered him quite seriously:

"Indeed, I should like to see the head of Medusa. But I have always understood that it was quite fatal to gaze upon her—that those who beheld her were turned immediately into stone."

"That can be avoided," returned my interlocutor. "I will furnish you with a mirror; and if you are truly careful, and succeed in restraining your curiosity, you can see her even as Perseus did. But you will have to be very circumspect. And she is really so fascinating that few have been able to refrain from looking at her directly. Yes, you must be very cautious. He! he! he!" His laughter was more horrible even than his smile; and even as he laughed, he began to pluck my sleeve, with a knotted hand that was wholly in keeping with his face, and which might well have gripped through untold ages the dark oars of the Stygian barge.

"Come with me—it is not far," he said. "And you will never have a second opportunity. I am the owner of the Head; and I do not show it to many. But I can see that you are one of the few who are fitted to appreciate it."

It is inexplicable to me that I should have accepted his invitation. The man's personality was highly abhorrent, the feeling he aroused in me was a mixture of irresistible fear and repugnance. In all likelihood he was a lunatic—perhaps a dangerous maniac; or, if not actually mad, was nurturing some ill design, some nefarious purpose to which I would lend myself by accompanying him. It was madness to go with him, it was folly even to listen to his words; and of course his wild claim concerning the ownership of the fabled Gorgon's head was too ridiculous even for the formality of disbelief. If such a thing had ever existed, even in mythic Greece, it was certainly not to be found in present-day London, in the possession of a doubtful-looking old man. The whole affair was more preposterous than a dream . . . but nevertheless I went with him. I was under a spell—the spell of unknown mystery, terror, absurdity; and I could no more have refused his offer than a dead man could have refused the conveyance of Charon to the realms of Hades.

"My house is not far away," he assured me, repetitiously, as we left the crowded street and plunged into a narrow, lightless alley. Perhaps he was right; though I have no precise idea of the distance which we traversed. The lanes and thoroughfares to which he led me were such as I could hardly have believed to exist in that portion of London; and I was hopelessly confused and astray in less than a minute. The houses were foul tenements, obviously of much antiquity, interspersed with a few decaying mansions that were doubtless even older, like remnants of some earlier city. I was struck by the fact that we met no one, apart from rare and furtive stragglers who seemed to avoid us. The air had grown extremely chill, and was fraught with unwonted odors that somehow served to reinforce the sensations of cold-

ness and utter age. Above all was a dead, unchanging sky, with its catafalque of oppressive and superincumbent grayness. I could not remember the streets through which we passed, though I was sure that I must have traversed this section of the city before in my wanderings; and a queer perplexity was now mingled with my feeling of dismay and bemusement. It seemed to me that the old man was leading me into a clueless maze of unreality, of deception and dubiety, where nothing was normal or familiar or legitimate.

The air darkened a little, as with the first encroachment of twilight, though it still lacked an hour of sunset-time. In this premonitory dusk, which did not deepen, but became stationary in its degree of shadow, through which all things were oddly distorted and assumed illusory proportions, we reached the house which was our destination.

It was one of the dilapidated mansions, and belonged to a period which I was unable to name despite my extensive architectural knowledge. It stood a little apart from the surrounding tenements; and more than the dimness of the premature twilight seemed to adhere to its dark walls and lampless windows. It impressed me with a sense of vastness; yet I have never been quite sure concerning its exact dimensions; and I can not remember the details of its façade, apart from the high and heavy door at the head of a flight of steps which were strangely worn as by the tread of incalculable generations.

The door swung open without sound beneath the gnarled fingers of the old man, who motioned me to precede him. I found myself in a long hall, illumed by silver lamps of an antique type such as I had never before seen in actual use. I think there were ancient tapestries and vases; and also a mosaic floor; but the lamps are the only things which I remember clearly. They burned with white flames that were preternaturally still and cold; and I thought that they had always burned in this manner, unflickering, unreplenished, throughout a frozen eternity whose days were in no wise different from its nights.

At the end of the hall, we entered a room that was similarly litten, and whose furniture was more than reminiscent of the classic. At the opposite side was an open door, giving on a second chamber, which appeared to be crowded with statuary; for I could see the outlines of still figures that were silhouetted or partially illumed by unseen lamps.

"Be seated," said my host, indicating a luxurious couch. "I will show you the Head in a few minutes; but haste is unseemly, when one is about to enter the very presence of Medusa."

I obeyed; but my host remained standing. He was paler and older and more erect than ever in the chill lamplight; and I sensed a sinewy, unnatural vigor, a diabolic vitality, which was terrifyingly incongruous with his extreme age. I shivered with more than the cold of the evening air and the dank mansion. Of course, I still felt that the old man's invitation was some sort of preposterous foolery or trickery. But the circumstances among which I found myself were unexplainable and uncanny. However, I mustered enough courage to ask a few questions.

"I am naturally surprized," I said, "to learn that the Gorgon's head has survived into modern times. Unless the

query is impertinent, will you not tell me how it came into your possession?"

"He! he!" laughed the old man, with a loathsome rictus. "That is easily answered: I won the head from Perseus at a game of dice, when he was in his dotage."

"But how is that possible?" I countered. "Perseus lived several thousand years ago."

"Yes, according to your notation. But time is not altogether the simple matter which you believe it to be. There are short-cuts between the ages, there are deviations and overlappings among the epochs, of which you have no idea. . . . Also, I can see that you are surprized to learn that the Head is in London. . . . But London after all is only a name; and there are shiftings, abbreviations and interchanges of space as well as of time."

I was amazed by his reasoning, but was forced to admit internally that it did not lack a certain logic.

"I see your point," I conceded. . . . "And now, of course, you will show me the Gorgon's head?"

"In a moment. But I must warn you again to be supremely careful; and also, you must be prepared for its exceeding and overwhelming beauty no less than for its horror. The danger lies, as you may well imagine, in the former quality."

He left the room, and soon returned, carrying in his hand a metal mirror of the same period as the lamps. The face was highly polished, with a reflecting surface well-nigh equal to that of glass; but the back and handle, with their strange carvings of Laocoon-like figures that writhed in a nameless, frozen agony, were black with the tarnish of elder centuries. It might well have been the very mirror that was employed by Perseus.

The old man placed it in my hands.

"Come," he said, and turned to the open door through which I had seen the crowded statuary.

"Keep your eyes on the mirror," he added, "and do not look beyond it. You will be in grave peril as soon as you enter this door."

He preceded me, averting his face from the portal, and gazing back across his shoulder with watchful orbs of malignant fire. My own eyes intent on the mirror, I followed.

The room was unexpectedly large; and was lit by many lamps that depended from chains of wrought silver. At first sight, when I had crossed the sill, I thought that it was entirely filled with stone statues, some of them standing erect in postures of a painful rigor, and others lying on the floor in agonized eternal contortions. Then, moving the mirror a little, I saw that there was a clear space through which one could walk, and a vaster vacant space at the opposite end of the room, surrounding a sort of altar. I could not see the whole of this altar, because the old man was now in my line of mirrored vision. But the figures beside me, at which I now dared to peep without the mirror's intermediation, were enough to absorb my interest for the moment.

They were all life-size; and they offered a most singular medley of historic periods. Yet it would seem that all of them, by the sameness of their dark material, like a black marble, and the uniform realism and verisimilitude of their technique, might well have been sculptured by the same hand. There were boys and bearded men in the chitons of Greece, there were mediæval monks, and knights

in armor, there were soldiers and scholars and great ladies of the Renaissance, of the Restoration, there were people of the Eighteenth, the Nineteenth, the Twentieth, centuries. And in every muscle, in every lineament of each, was stamped an incredible suffering, an unspeakable fear. And more and more as I studied them, a ghastly and hideous conjecture was formulated in my mind.

The old man was at my elbow, leering and peering into my face with a demoniac malice.

"You are admiring my collection of statuary," he said. "And I can see that you are impressed by its realism. . . . But perhaps you have already guessed that the statues are identical with their models. These people are the unfortunates who were not content to see Medusa only in a mirror. . . . I warned them . . . even as I have warned you. . . . But the temptation was too much for them."

I could say nothing. My thoughts were full of terror, consternation, stupefaction. Had the old man told me the truth, did he really possess anything so impossible and mythical as the Gorgon's head? Those statues were *too* life-like, *too* veridical in all their features, in their poses that preserved a lethal fear, their faces marked with a deadly but undying torment. No human sculptor could have wrought them, could have reproduced the physiognomies and the costumes with a fidelity so consummate and so atrocious.

"Now," said my host, "having seen those who were overpowered by the beauty of Medusa, it is time for you to behold the Gorgon herself." He stepped to one side, eyeing me intently; and I saw in the metal mirror the whole of that strange altar which his body had partially intercepted from my view. It was draped with some funereal black fabric; and lamps were burning on each side with their tall and frozen flames. In the center, on a broad paten of silver or electrum, there stood the veritable Head, even as the ancient myths have depicted it, with vipers crawling and lifting among its matted locks.

How can I delineate or even suggest that which is beyond the normal scope of human sensation or imagining? I saw in the mirror a face of unspeakably radiant pallor—a dead face from which there poured the luminous, blinding glory of celestial corruption, of superhuman bale and suffering. With lidless, intolerable eyes, with lips that were parted in an agonizing smile, she was lovely, she was dreadful beyond any vision ever vouchsafed to a mystic or an artist; and the light that emanated from her features was the light of worlds that lie too deep or too high for mortal perception. Hers was the dread that turns the marrow into ice, and the anguish that slays like a bolt of lightning.

Long did I gaze in the mirror, with the shuddering awe of one who beholds the veilless countenance of a final mystery. I was terrified, appalled—and fascinated to the core of my being; for that which I saw was the ultimate death, the ultimate beauty. I desired, yet I did not dare, to turn and lift my eyes to the reality whose mere reflection was a fatal splendor.

The old man had stepped closer; he was peering into the mirror and watching me with furtive glances, by turns.

"Is she not beautiful?" he whispered. "Could you not gaze upon her forever? And do you not long to behold her without the intermediation of the mirror, which hardly does her justice?"

I shivered at his words, and at something which I sensed behind them.

"No! no!" I cried, vehemently. "I admit all that you say. But I will not gaze any longer; and I am not mad enough to let myself be turned into a stone image."

I thrust the mirror into his hands as I spoke, and turned to leave, impelled by an access of overmastering fright. I feared the allurement of Medusa; and I loathed that evil ancient with a loathing that was beyond limit or utterance.

The mirror clattered on the floor, as the old man dropped it and sprang upon me with a tigerish agility. He seized me with his knotted hands, and though I had sensed their sinewy vigor, I was not prepared for the demoniacal strength with which he whirled me about and thrust me toward the altar.

"Look! look!" he shrieked, and his voice was that of a fiend who urges the damned to some further pit of perdition.

I had closed my eyes instinctively, but even through my lids I felt the searing radiance. I knew, I believed implicitly the fate which would be mine if I beheld Medusa face to face. I struggled madly but impotently against the grip that held me; and I concentrated all my will to keep my lids from lighting even by the breadth of an eyelash.

Suddenly my arms were freed, and I felt the diabolic fingers on my brow, groping swiftly to find my eyes. I knew their purpose, and knew also that the old man must have closed his own eyes to avoid the doom he had designed for me. I broke away, I turned, I grappled with him; and we fought insanely, frantically, as he strove to swing me about with one arm and tore at my shut eyelids with his other hand. Young as I am, and muscular, I was no match for him; and I swerved slowly toward the altar, with my head bent back till my neck was almost broken, in a vain effort to avoid the iron fumbling of his fingers. A moment more, and he would have conquered; but the space in which we fought was narrow, and he had now driven me back against a row of the stone figures, some of which were recumbent on the floor. He must have stumbled over one of these, for he fell suddenly with a wild, despairing cry, and released me as he went down. I heard him strike the floor with a crash that was singularly heavy—a crash as of something harder and more massive and more ponderous than a human body.

Still standing with shut eyes, I waited; but there was no sound and no movement from the old man. Bending toward the floor, I ventured to look between half-open lids. He was lying at my feet, beside the figure on which he had tripped; and I needed no second glance to recognize in all his limbs, in all his lineaments, the same rigidity and the same horror which characterized the other statues. Like them, he had been smitten instantaneously into an image of dark stone. In falling, he had seen the very face of Medusa, even as his victims had seen it. And now he would lie among them forever.

Somehow, with no backward glance, I fled from the room, I found my way from that horrible mansion, I sought to lose it from sight and memory in half-deserted, mysterious alleys that were no legitimate part of London. The chill of ancient death was upon me; it hung in the web of timeless twilight along those irrecognizable ways, around those innominable houses; and it followed me as I went. But at last, by what miracle I know not, I came to a familiar street, where people thronged in the lamplit dusk, and the air was no longer chill except with a falling fog.

In the Microcosmos

By RICHARD H. HART

Fielding experienced several minutes of utter horror on a table-top of Professor Obermann's microscope

I FIRST met Professor Konrad Obermann two years ago. At that time he was employed as an expert witness in a case I was trying, a case hinging on the results of some very delicate microscopic observation. What impressed me most at that time was the way in which he often anticipated my questions, almost as if he were able to read my mind.

His testimony enabled me to win my case, and we became quite friendly. That is to say, he seemed friendly enough, and I respected and admired his intellect and learning, although somehow or other I could not bring myself to the point of complete trust in his moral qualities. At his invitation, I spent a number of evenings in his rooms, smoking pipefuls of mellow tobacco and discussing with him philosophy and its left-handed cousins, metaphysics, alchemy and astrology.

I happened to make a casual remark, one evening, about the soul, and Obermann at once caught me up.

"The soul—do you know how large a soul is?" he asked.

I admitted that I was uninformed on the subject.

"*Bah,*" said he, "people talk about large souls, but at least a thousand of them could dance on the point of a pin—like the angels which the mediæval bigots used to argue about."

"You speak with a great deal of assurance," was all I could answer.

"Yes?" he smiled, provokingly. "But wait. If you will come here tomorrow night, I will prove it. You are coming?"

In spite of the wild improbability of his statement, he was plainly in earnest, and I left him with a smiling promise to return at the time he mentioned.

I WAS promptness itself, the following evening, but if I could have had any foreknowledge of the result of my visit I should have been miles away, and speeding in the opposite direction.

Professor Obermann had not previously shown me his laboratory, although it opened directly off the sitting-room where we had been used to hold our friendly discussions. It was a plain, bare room, scrupulously neat, and besides two chairs contained nothing but an enameled metal table holding a compound microscope and two or three other instruments, a rack of glass slides, and a large piece of apparatus which I recognized as a Roentgen-ray projector.

When he had followed me in, Obermann closed the door carefully behind him.

"Not much to look at, is it?" he remarked. "But wait: there will be plenty to *see.*"

"I hope so," I answered; "that's what I'm here for."

"Good," said he. "Now, before we begin, there are certain things which I must explain. You are familiar with the principle of the stereopticon, I suppose?"

"That variety of magic-lantern which projects the image of an opaque picture or some other object upon the screen? Yes."

"Good, again. But perhaps you will be surprized to hear that I have developed a piece of apparatus for use in conjunction with X-rays, whose projection is not merely an image, but an actual reproduction in miniature of the object itself. It sounds impossible, but I have done it.

"It is simply that I employ a light of such enormous power that it is strong enough to pick up a number of ions from each atom of the object and transfer them to a screen, where they are of course reassembled in proper order by the crystal lenses. Perhaps it was misleading to say a reproduction in miniature; I should better have said 'micro-miniature,' since it is only visible through a strong microscope."

The professor looked at me inquiringly.

"I think I follow you," I answered his unspoken question, "although I don't know whether or not I believe you."

"Seeing is believing," returned Obermann, sententiously, "and you shall soon see."

He closed a switch, and the Crookes tube of the X-ray projector glowed with its unreal light. After a few moments of adjusting his microscope and another contrivance of lenses and mirrors, he announced that he was ready. He took a key from his pocket and laid it upon a glass slide between the projector and the first lens.

"Observe this key closely," he admonished. "Now, come and look through the microscope."

I obeyed, and was able to make out the key, its image or reproduction, in the field of the microscope.

"I see it," I said, "but I can't say that that proves anything—except that you've projected an uncommonly small image."

"So?" retorted Obermann. "See here!"

He jerked open the switch of the X-ray machine; the light in the tube died out. "Now look again," he ordered.

I peered into the microscope—and gasped. The key was still visible! Although the light which had produced the image had been extinguished, it was still there. But I refused to believe it.

"It's an hallucination of some kind," I insisted.

"Your doubt dies hard," returned Obermann, smiling rather queerly, "but I think that I can put an end to it very quickly. Wait here a moment."

He left the room, and returned almost instantly with a tiny black puppy.

"This is Fritz," he said. "He will be only a month old tomorrow, but I think his ego is well enough developed for our purpose. We shall soon see."

He placed the puppy upon the table and readjusted his lenses, moving the Roentgen-ray projector farther away. Then he closed the switch, and the Crookes tube glowed again. He peered through the microscope, made further adjustments of the apparatus, and returned to the eyepiece. This time, he smiled with evident pleasure. He beckoned me to the instrument.

"Look," he said.

I could see the puppy plainly, but this proved nothing new, and I said so.

The professor merely smiled and opened the switch of the Roentgen-ray projector; once more the light faded from the tube. I returned to the eyepiece of the microscope, and saw that the image of the puppy was still there.

"Continue to look," admonished Obermann in a queer, preoccupied tone.

I stared into the eyepiece. Incredible as it seemed, the image of the puppy moved. It wagged its tail. It bit its foreleg as if in search of a flea. It was *alive*.

"My God, Obermann," I gasped, turning away from the microscope, "if this thing isn't an illusion—a fraud of

some kind—you've done more than project a miniature reproduction! You've projected life itself!"

Obermann smiled complacently.

"The vital principle, if you please," he said; "some call it the ego, others the soul, although few will admit that animals have souls. Look at the puppy."

I looked, and gasped again. It seemed as if I was never to have done with gasping. The little animal lay inert upon the table, its limbs extended, its eyes fixed and unseeing. I returned to the microscope and saw what appeared to be the same puppy full of life, frisking about, chasing his tail. It was too much!

I turned upon Obermann, and fixed my eyes upon his. He seemed to welcome the challenge, and returned my stare intensely.

"You must be the devil," I said. "Tell me, what have you done to that animal?"

"Simple enough," he returned, holding my gaze steadily. "I projected a miniature reproduction of his body—flesh, bones, organs, everything—with my apparatus; I projected his life-principle into that reproduction with my *mind*. I could do the same with *you*."

"No, no! No you don't!" I gasped, striving to tear away my eyes from his gaze. But I could not do it, and panic seized me.

The room, the table, the apparatus, Obermann himself, faded from view. I could see nothing but those terrible eyes, pale green, shot with ice-cold sparks. Then they, too, vanished.

When I again became aware of existence, it was to find myself in a seemingly illimitable white desert. As far as my eye could reach was a monotonous waste of flinty hillocks, without sand or soil or vegetation of any description. How I had come there, I could not imagine, but the loneliness of the place struck terror to my soul. I got to my feet and stumbled off in search of a more hospitable locality.

As I began to tire of climbing over the stony hillocks, I happened to glance upward. I looked again, came to a full stop, and sat down abruptly. There were no clouds to be seen, and although everything about me was as bright as noonday *there was no sun in the sky*.

It was beyond comprehension, and I dropped my head into my hands and strove to think. Where was I? How had I come there?

But nothing came of it. I found that I could not even remember my name. I was just I—a man lost in a boundless, unfriendly desert, with no recollection of the past and no prospect for the future save death from hunger and thirst. Those two sensations were very real; they goaded me to my feet, and I stumbled onward.

Looking upward again, I saw that the air I had thought empty was full of little creatures no larger than my thumb, floating aimlessly about. They were almost transparent, and of various shapes. Some of them were like spiral worms, others like jelly-fish, while a few were like animated dandelion seeds with sails spread to catch the faint breeze. One of them settled on my forearm and I brushed it off, to discover that it was almost weightless. I finally decided that they were harmless, and paid them no more attention.

For possibly half an hour I trudged onward over the hard hummocks; then habit forced my hands into my pockets.

"Cigarettes and matches, or my name isn't John Fielding!" I exclaimed, and immediately proceeded to smoke.

It was only when my cigarette was half consumed that I realized that I had spoken my own name. So I was John Fielding; I was pleased to find my recollection returning—to that extent, at least.

But I could remember nothing further. I plodded on.

I was beginning to grow very weary, when from the top of a hummock I saw a small animal of some kind. I approached it cautiously, and was relieved to find that it was not alive. It was about the size of a six-weeks-old chicken, but without wings, and having a number of insect-like legs. Its head was small, and indistinctly separated from its body. It had cruel-looking mandibles and a pipe-like upper lip.

"It's like a flea, greatly magnified," I said to myself, and the word "magnified" stirred another chord in my memory. It had something to do with my present plight, I was sure, but the connection was not clear. I gave up the problem, at last, and went on.

There was no change in the hard, rough terrain, and the monotony of it was appalling. I lay down, at last, and closed my eyes; as much to shut out the desolate landscape as anything else. While I lay there, I tried to think, to remember. I became aware that I was looking for some one with a German name, but the name eluded me.

Suddenly there came a barking roar and a thunderous tramping noise, very close by. I sprang to my feet and opened my eyes in time to see a large black animal charging down upon me. I leaped nimbly to one side, just as it galloped past me on its four awkward legs.

It stopped, then, wheeling around, and crouched down, regarding me with its round blue eyes. Apparently satisfied with my appearance, it protruded a large pink tongue and settled down to panting in a business-like manner. This convinced me that it must be a dog of some kind, although I had never heard of any dog a tenth its size.

"Nice dog," I said, extending a conciliatory hand.

I was rewarded by its leaping upon me and bowling me over. It was upon me before I could rise, and I watched with horror as it opened its jaws and the slaver dripped from its mouth.

But it merely snapped at me once, then licked my face. I realized from this that it intended me no harm, and was only playful. Reassured, I got to my feet again and climbed upon its back, holding myself upright by its long coarse hair. I kicked it in the flanks with my heels, and it started off at a trot. Perhaps, I thought, it will take me out of this desert.

I rode steadily for what seemed a very long time, without coming upon any appreciable change in the scenery. Just as I was beginning again to despair, my strange steed clambered upon a hummock slightly higher than its fellows, and I saw in the distance what seemed to be a mountain of some transparent substance resembling glass.

In shape it was a perfect hemisphere, its flat section forming the base, and seemed at least half a mile in height. Opalescent lights played over its surface, giving the illusion of continual movement, although it was quite still. I rode on up to it, and dismounted at its base. Touching it with my hand, I found that it was not hard, as I had expected, but quite elastic.

Pursuing my experiments, I was prodding it with an inquisitive index finger when my hand suddenly broke through the surface and plunged my arm into the substance up to my elbow. Hastily withdrawing my arm, I found that it was wet with something which investigation proved to be water.

Thankfully I plunged both arms through the elastic surface and with my cupped hands brought up a quantity of the water, which I drank eagerly. I repeated the operation until my thirst was quite satisfied.

It occurred to me, then, that my queer charger might also be thirsty, and I drew out another double handful of water and offered it to him. He tried to lap it from my hands, but his tongue was too large for the purpose. Suddenly, he charged straight at the transparent mountain.

His head and shoulders broke through the surface with the impetus of his rush. The mountain trembled, and, sensing disaster, I turned to flee.

But it was too late. Before I had taken two steps, I was caught up in a raging flood and borne along at terrific speed. The waters closed over my despairing head.

"It is Obermann's fault!" flashed through my brain, and I lost consciousness.

OPENING my eyes, I found myself seated in a chair, with the microscopist bending over me. Beyond him was the X-ray projector and other apparatus which he used in his experiments.

"My conscience!" I exclaimed. "I must have been asleep; I've just had a terrible dream."

Obermann smiled slightly. "Tell me about it."

I described in minute detail my wanderings in the white desert, and what I had seen and experienced, ending with an account of my terrifying mishap in connection with the transparent mountain.

Obermann's smile became broader, triumphant.

"Your experiences have been no dream," he said. "They took place in what I am pleased to call the microcosmos: that world which is so infinitely small that it can only be seen through the most powerful of compound microscopes.

"The white desert you speak of," he went on, "was nothing more nor less than the top of this white-enameled table. As every microscopist knows, nothing is really smooth. Observe!"

Obediently I looked through the eyepiece—and shuddered. As I beheld again that monotonous but familiar landscape, the skin along my spine crawled with a recrudescence of horror.

"The small animal you mentioned was a flea," continued Obermann, "and the larger but the puppy, Fritz. The reason that he appeared so large in comparison with yourself was due to the difference in focus of the lens through which you were both projected. I could have made your own projection the larger, just as easily.

"The 'transparent mountain' you encountered was simply a small drop of water—almost too small to be seen with the naked eye. It was unfortunate that the puppy should have broken its surface tension and brought it down upon you. If you had not happened to remember me at the critical moment, thus enabling me to re-establish *rapport* and bring back your soul to your proper body, you would quite probably have been drowned—a most unhappy ending to a brilliant experiment."

I stood up, trembling with anger.

"Do you mean to tell me," I demanded, "that my soul was actually transferred by you to a small image formed like those others, and that I could really have been drowned in that drop of water?"

Obermann grinned, evidently misreading my emotion.

"It is quite true," he said. "You have had a most fortunate escape."

A red curtain fell over my eyeballs and my fist lashed out toward Obermann. It caught him on the point of the chin and dropped him like an axed steer.

At the door, I turned back for a Parthian shot.

"That right hook may not have knocked you into your 'microcosmos'," I said, "but I'll bet you feel a damned sight smaller!"

Midnight Madness

By OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

A blow in the night, a man thrown overboard—by these means Carl Van Doorn mistakenly thought to secure happiness for himself

TWO men sat idly smoking on the rear deck of the yacht *Doris*. Neither had spoken for fully twenty minutes, for both were busy with their thoughts.

For three years, both had been suitors for the hand of Doris Page. Clayton Raeburn had won, despite the fact that Carl Van Doorn was immensely wealthy while he depended on a salary. Van Doorn, however, had shown himself a game loser by promptly inviting the happy couple to cruise with him to the Bermudas in the yacht he had named for the girl whom both men loved. He had been a most congenial and companionable host, and Clayton's thoughts at length resolved themselves into spoken words.

"It's been awfully good of you, Carl," he said, "inviting us on this trip, I mean, and treating us as guests of honor after —after——"

"Don't mention it, old top," Van Doorn interrupted cordially. "It has been the greatest pleasure of my life."

His face, calm and smiling in the moonlight, gave no more hint of the raging storm within his bosom than did the even, pleasant tones of his voice. Van Doorn would have made a great actor.

Raeburn rose, walked to the stern rail and tossed his glowing cigar into the water. Far off to the port side he saw a dark fringe of palm trees silhouetted against the sky, and below them a curved, silvery outline: the white, sandy beach of a tropical islet.

"A veritable fairyland," he exclaimed. "It's bedtime, but I feel——"

The sentence was never finished. Something struck him a terrific blow on the head, his knees sagged, and he sank to the deck unconscious.

Van Doorn cast a quick, sly glance about the ship. All his guests had retired. Officers and men had gone below, with the exception of the helmsman, whose voice, dimly audible above the throbbing drone of the engines and the churn of the propeller, was raised in a rollicking sailors' chanty as he stood at the wheel, his eyes on the moon-silvered waves ahead. Quickly tossing his blackjack away, he picked up the huddled, inert form of Raeburn and heaved it over the rail. For a moment he saw the flash of a white face disappearing beneath the foaming water—and shuddered. The ship's bell tolled the hour of midnight as he turned away from the rail with a shrug of his shoulders, calmly lighted a cigarette, and walked to his cabin on soundless, rubber-soled shoes, his actor face a study in tranquillity.

THE Page-Van Doorn wedding was a gorgeous affair. As Doris and her husband mounted the steps of the Pullman that was to convey them to the country home in which they had decided to spend their honeymoon, a cheering group

of friends waved gay farewells and wished them happiness.

Van Doorn found his bride strangely reticent after they were settled in their compartment. He made several unsuccessful attempts at conversation, then lapsed into moody silence, wondering what had come over her so suddenly. She had been cheerful and vivacious up to the moment when they boarded the train. Could it be that she had guessed? But, no. That was impossible.

Doris had guessed nothing, suspected nothing. The affair on the yacht had been too well planned and too skilfully executed for that. Raeburn had disappeared during the night. That was all any one knew. Van Doorn told his story in so plausible and straightforward a manner, how he had left his friend standing near the rail at midnight and gone to his cabin alone, that every one believed him without question. It was decided that Doris' fiancé had either leaped or fallen overboard when there was no one around to see. She was thinking of a shattered dream of love—a cherished vision that had faded with the disappearance of her lover.

Carl Van Doorn had been good to her during their return from the Bermudas and throughout the long, dreary year that had intervened between the finish of that trip and their wedding. His show of sympathy and his evidently sincere grief at the loss of his friend had won her regard. For months he had dropped no hint of love or marriage, waiting with patience born of a subtle understanding of the minds of women. At the psychological moment he had spoken, and she had capitulated—with reservations.

"I do not—can not—love you, Carl," she had said, sadly. "You know that all my love was Clayton's and will be to the end of time. I suppose I must marry some one, though, so if you want me you must take me as I am."

"I will teach you to love anew," he had exclaimed as he took her in his arms and rained kisses on her unresponsive lips.

All these memories returned to her as she looked out on the swiftly moving landscape, and she wondered why she had married Carl Van Doorn. Even the touch of his hand on hers sent a feeling of loathing through her entire being.

When they arrived at the station Van Doorn's worries were multiplied. His chauffeur had sent word that the car in which he had intended to meet them had been damaged in a collision and was out of commission. Then there was trouble about the baggage. His wife's trunk, containing her trousseau, was missing and could not be located, either in the baggage cars or the station. After twenty minutes spent in the telegraph office he learned that the trunk had been left behind but would be forwarded on the next train.

On his return to the waiting-room he found Doris talking to a ragged derelict who wore blue glasses that announced his affliction and carried a tray of cheap pencils.

"Come," he said, a bit petulantly. "We must take a taxi. Your trunk will be along at six this evening and I have arranged to have it delivered to the house immediately." He noticed, with surprize, that there were tears in her eyes and she seemed unusually pale. "Why, what's the matter?" he asked apprehensively. "What has this tramp said to you?"

"Oh, I am so sorry for him," she murmured. "Think of the horror of a lifetime spent in darkness."

Van Doorn extracted a roll of bills from his pocket, tossed one carelessly on

the tray and hurried her out the door and into the waiting taxicab. She was trembling and tearful as they drove through the streets of the village and thence along the dusty road which led to the estate of her husband.

"You are too tender-hearted, dear," he said gently. "Don't let the story of this blind man spoil the first day of our honeymoon. There are thousands of blind men in the world with stories just as sad."

"Be patient with me, Carl, and I promise you I shall be myself presently," she replied bravely, winking away the tears.

Soon they turned into a delightful driveway which curved through artistically massed flowers and shrubbery, and drew up before a well-executed reproduction of an English country house.

They spent the afternoon roaming about the spacious grounds, and Van Doorn was pleased by the fact that Doris had regained her accustomed vivacity. Her usual sparkling wit was in evidence at their tête-à-tête dinner. Afterward, in the music room, she played the piano and sang for him in her full, sweet contralto. He seized her hands as she rose, a world of passion in his eyes.

"You are wonderful, adorable, Doris," he exclaimed, pressing her hands to his lips.

"I am tired after our journey and—and everything," she murmured.

Suddenly he crushed her in his arms, smothering her with kisses.

"Please, Carl," she gasped. "Not—not now."

"But you are——"

"I know. Please go now. You may come back to me if you wish—*at midnight.*"

He went into his own room, puzzled and a bit sulky, closing the connecting door with unnecessary violence. With difficulty he repressed a sudden impulse to turn and enter her room, then flung himself savagely into a chair.

"Patience, fool," he muttered. "Would you spoil everything now by haste?"

A glance at his watch revealed the fact that it was not quite nine o'clock. Three hours until midnight. And why had she said "midnight"? he wondered. He lighted a cigarette and pondered the matter.

An hour passed during which he consumed one cigarette after another. That hour seemed like an age as his watch slowly ticked off the seconds. He removed his clothing and put on pajamas and slippers, then resumed his seat in the chair and tried to read. Presently he fell asleep. Wild dreams disturbed his slumber and he tossed restlessly. One dream in particular caused him to moan and cry out in his sleep—the vision of a white face going down—down beneath the blue-green water.

HE AWOKE with a start, bathed in a cold perspiration, the horror of that dream fixed in his consciousness. A chill of horror ran the length of his spine. This would not do. He must pull himself together.

For the moment he had forgotten his tryst with his wife. His watch, lying on the dresser, showed one minute of twelve. Opening the door of her room, he looked in. She had extinguished her light and her bed was bathed in the silver rays of the moon shining in through the window.

He closed the door and stepped softly to her bedside. How pale her face looked, there in the moonlight, against the folds of wavy hair that were spread on her pillow! Somehow it reminded him of another face—a pallid face surrounded by whirling, foaming water—and he shuddered.

The mood passed quickly, however,

and was followed by one of exultation. She was his—all his! The blood surged to his temples. His brain reeled with the mad intoxication of her nearness as he bent to take her in his arms. Suddenly he leaped back from the bed with a gasp of dread amazement. Instead of the soft, warm body of his wife, he had clasped to his bosom a cold corpse!

Doris dead? Impossible! What could have killed her? Had she taken her own life? At length he grew conscious of an acrid odor in the room and saw the cause. A half-emptied bottle of carbolic acid stood on the dressing-table. With a wild sob he gripped it in his shaking fingers and poured the searing liquid down his throat. He sank to the floor in agony as the great clock in the hall announced the hour of midnight.

DOWN at the railway station, a blind man boarded the midnight train. A blow on the head had gradually robbed him of his sight, and months of exposure on a tropical island had browned and dried his skin like parchment. Even his closest friends would scarcely have recognized him *as Clayton Raeburn!*

Berenice

By EDGAR ALLAN POE

MISERY is manifold. The wretchedness of earth is multiform. Overreaching the wide horizon as the rainbow, its hues are as various as the hues of that arch—as distinct too, yet as intimately blended. Overreaching the wide horizon as the rainbow! How is it that from beauty I have derived a type of unloveliness?—from the covenant of peace, a smile of sorrow? But, as in ethics, evil is a consequence of good, so, in fact, out of joy is sorrow born. Either the memory of past bliss is the anguish of today, or the agonies which *are,* have their origin in the ecstasies which *might have been.*

My baptismal name is Egæus; that of my family I will not mention. Yet there are no towers in the land more time-honored than my gloomy, gray, hereditary halls. Our line has been called a race of visionaries; and in many striking par-

ticulars—in the character of the family mansion—in the frescoes of the chief saloon—in the tapestries of the dormitories—in the chiselling of some buttresses in the armory—but more especially in the gallery of antique paintings—in the fashion of the library chamber—and, lastly, in the very peculiar nature of the library's contents—there is more than sufficient evidence to warrant the belief.

The recollections of my earliest years are connected with that chamber, and with its volumes—of which latter I will say no more. Here died my mother. Herein I was born. But it is mere idleness to say that I had not lived before—that the soul has no previous existence. You deny it?—let us not argue the matter. Convinced myself, I seek not to convince. There is, however, a remembrance of aërial forms—of spiritual and meaning eyes—of sounds, musical yet sad; a remembrance which will not be excluded; a memory like a shadow—vague, variable, indefinite, unsteady; and like a shadow, too, in the impossibility of my getting rid of it while the sunlight of my reason shall exist.

In that chamber was I born. Thus awaking from the long night of what seemed, but was not, non-entity, at once into the very regions of fairyland—into a palace of imagination—into the wild dominions of monastic thought and erudition—it is not singular that I gazed around me with a startled and ardent eye—that I loitered away my boyhood in books, and dissipated my youth in revery; but it *is* singular, that as years rolled away, and the noon of manhood found me still in the mansion of my fathers—it *is* wonderful what a stagnation there fell upon the springs of my life—wonderful how total an inversion took place in the character of my commonest thought. The realities of the world affected me as visions, and as visions only, while the wild ideas of the land of dreams became, in turn, not the material of my everyday existence, but in very deed that existence utterly and solely in itself.

* * * * * * *

BERENICE and I were cousins, and we grew up together in my paternal halls. Yet differently we grew—I, ill of health, and buried in gloom—she, agile, graceful, and overflowing with energy; hers the ramble on the hillside—mine, the studies of the cloister; I, living within my own heart, and addicted, body and soul, to the most intense and painful meditation — she, roaming carelessly through life, with no thought of the shadows in her path, or the silent flight of the raven-winged hours. Berenice!—I call upon her name — Berenice! — and from the gray ruins of memory a thousand tumultuous recollections are startled at the sound! Ah, vividly is her image before me now, as in the early days of her light-heartedness and joy! Oh, gorgeous yet fantastic beauty! Oh, sylph amid the shrubberies of Arnheim! Oh, naiad among its fountains! And then—then all is mystery and terror, and a tale which should not be told. Disease—a fatal disease, fell like the simoom upon her frame; and even while I gazed upon her, the spirit of change swept over her, pervading her mind, her habits, and her character, and, in a manner the most subtle and terrible, disturbing even the identity of her person! Alas! the destroyer came and went!—and the victim—where is she? I knew her not—or knew her no longer as Berenice!

Among the numerous train of maladies superinduced by that fatal and primary one which effected a revolution of so horrible a kind in the moral and physical being of my cousin, may be mentioned as the most distressing and obstinate in its nature, a species of epilepsy not un-

frequently terminating in *trance* itself—trance very nearly resembling positive dissolution, and from which her manner of recovery was, in most instances, startlingly abrupt. In the meantime, my own disease—for I have been told that I should call it by no other appellation—my own disease, then, grew rapidly upon me, and assumed finally a monomaniac character of a novel and extraordinary form—hourly and momently gaining vigor—and at length obtaining over me the most incomprehensible ascendency. This monomania, if I must so term it, consisted in a morbid irritability of those properties of the mind in metaphysical science termed the *attentive*. It is more than probable that I am not understood; but I fear, indeed, that it is in no manner possible to convey to the mind of the merely general reader an adequate idea of that nervous *intensity of interest* with which, in my case, the powers of meditation (not to speak technically) busied and buried themselves, in the contemplation of even the most ordinary objects of the universe.

To muse for long unwearied hours, with my attention riveted to some frivolous device on the margin or in the typography of a book; to become absorbed, for the better part of a summer's day, in a quaint shadow falling aslant upon the tapestry or upon the floor; to lose myself, for an entire night, in watching the steady flame of a lamp, or the embers of a fire; to dream away whole days over the perfume of a flower; to repeat, monotonously, some common word, until the sound, by dint of frequent repetition, ceased to convey any idea whatever to the mind; to lose all sense of motion or physical existence, by means of absolute bodily quiescence long and obstinately persevered in: such were a few of the most common and least pernicious vagaries induced by a condition of the mental faculties, not, indeed, altogether unparalleled, but certainly bidding defiance to anything like analysis or explanation.

Yet let me not be misapprehended. The undue, earnest, and morbid attention thus excited by objects in their own nature frivolous, must not be confounded in character with that ruminating propensity common to all mankind, and more especially indulged in by persons of ardent imagination. It was not even, as might be at first supposed, an extreme condition, or exaggeration of such propensity, but primarily and essentially distinct and different. In the one instance, the dreamer, or enthusiast, being interested by an object usually *not* frivolous, imperceptibly loses sight of this object in a wilderness of deductions and suggestions issuing therefrom, until, at the conclusion of a day-dream *often replete with luxury*, he finds the *incitamentum*, or first cause of his musings, entirely vanished and forgotten. In my case, the primary object was *invariably frivolous*, although assuming, through the medium of my distempered vision, a refracted and unreal importance. Few deductions, if any, were made; and those few pertinaciously returning in upon the original object as a center. The meditations were *never* pleasurable; and, at the termination of the revery, the first cause, so far from being out of sight, had attained that supernaturally exaggerated interest which was the prevailing feature of the disease. In a word, the powers of mind more particularly exercised were, with me, as I have said before, the *attentive*, and are, with the day-dreamer, the *speculative*.

My books, at this epoch, if they did not

actually serve to irritate the disorder, partook, it will be perceived, largely, in their imaginative and inconsequential nature, of the characteristic qualities of the disorder itself. I well remember, among others, the treatise of the noble Italian, Cœlius Secundus Curio, *"De Amplitudine Beati Regni Dei;"* St. Augustin's great work, "The City of God;" and Tertullian's *"De Carne Christi,"* in which the paradoxical sentence, *"Mortuus est Dei filius; credibile est quia ineptum est; et sepultus resurrexit; certum est quia impossibile est,"* occupied my undivided time, for many weeks of laborious and fruitless investigation.

Thus it will appear that, shaken from its balance only by trivial things, my reason bore resemblance to that ocean-crag spoken of by Ptolemy Hephestion, which steadily resisting the attacks of human violence, and the fiercer fury of the waters and the winds, trembled only to the touch of the flower called Asphodel. And although, to a careless thinker, it might appear a matter beyond doubt, that the alteration produced by her unhappy malady, in the *moral* condition of Berenice, would afford me many objects for the exercise of that intense and abnormal meditation whose nature I have been at some trouble in explaining, yet such was not in any degree the case. In the lucid intervals of my infirmity, her calamity, indeed, gave me pain, and, taking deeply to heart that total wreck of her fair and gentle life, I did not fail to ponder, frequently and bitterly, upon the wonder-working means by which so strange a revolution had been so suddenly brought to pass. But these reflections partook not of the idiosyncrasy of my disease, and were such as would have occurred, under similar circumstances, to the ordinary mass of mankind. True to its own character, my disorder revelled in the less important but more startling changes wrought in the *physical* frame of Berenice—in the singular and most appalling distortion of her personal identity.

During the brightest days of her unparalleled beauty, most surely I had never loved her. In the strange anomaly of my existence, feeling with me *had never been* of the heart, and my passions *always were* of the mind. Through the gray of the early morning—among the trellised shadows of the forest at noonday—and in the silence of my library at night—she had flitted by my eyes, and I had seen her—not as the living and breathing Berenice, but as the Berenice of a dream; not as a being of the earth, earthly, but as the abstraction of such a being; not as a thing to admire, but to analyze; not as an object of love, but as the theme of the most abstruse although desultory speculation. And *now*—now I shuddered in her presence, and grew pale at her approach; yet, bitterly lamenting her fallen and desolate condition, I called to mind that she had loved me long, and, in an evil moment, I spoke to her of marriage.

And at length the period of our nuptials was approaching, when, upon an afternoon in the winter of the year—one of those unseasonably warm, calm, and misty days which are the nurse of the beautiful Halcyon—I sat (and sat, as I thought, alone) in the inner apartment of the library. But uplifting my eyes, I saw that Berenice stood before me.

Was it my own excited imagination—or the misty influence of the atmosphere—or the uncertain twilight of the chamber—or the gray draperies which fell around her figure—that caused in it so vacillating and indistinct an outline? I could not tell. She spoke no word; and I—not for worlds could I have uttered a syllable. An icy chill ran through my frame; a sense of insufferable anxiety op-

pressed me; a consuming curiosity pervaded my soul; and, sinking back upon the chair, I remained for some time breathless and motionless, with my eyes riveted upon her person. Alas! its emaciation was excessive, and not one vestige of the former being lurked in any single line of the contour. My burning glances at length fell upon the face.

The forehead was high, and very pale, and singularly placid; and the once jetty hair fell partially over it, and overshadowed the hollow temples with innumerable ringlets, now of a vivid yellow, and jarring discordantly, in their fantastic character, with the reigning melancholy of the countenance. The eyes were lifeless, and lusterless, and seemingly pupilless, and I shrank involuntarily from their glassy stare to the contemplation of the thin and shrunken lips. They parted; and in a smile of peculiar meaning, *the teeth* of the changed Berenice disclosed themselves slowly to my view. Would to God that I had never beheld them, or that, having done so, I had died!

* * * * * * *

The shutting of a door disturbed me, and looking up, I found that my cousin had departed from the chamber. But from the disordered chamber of my brain had not, alas! departed, and would not be driven away, the white and ghastly *spectrum* of the teeth. Not a speck on their surface—not a shade on their enamel—not an indenture in their edges—but what the brief period of her smile had sufficed to brand in upon my memory. I saw them *now* even more unequivocally than I beheld them *then*. The teeth!—the teeth!—they were here, and there, and everywhere, and visibly and palpably before me; long, narrow, and excessively white, with the pale lips writhing about them, as in the very moment of their first terrible development. Then came the full fury of my *monomania*, and I struggled in vain against its strange and irresistible influence. In the multiplied objects of the external world I had no thoughts but for the teeth. For these I longed with a frenzied desire. All other matters and all different interests became absorbed in their single contemplation. They—they alone were present to the mental eye, and they, in their sole individuality, became the essence of my mental life. I held them in every light. I turned them in every attitude. I surveyed their characteristics. I dwelt upon their peculiarities. I pondered upon their conformation. I mused upon the alteration in their nature. I shuddered as I assigned to them, in imagination, a sensitive and sentient power, and even when unassisted by the lips, a capability of moral expression. Of Mademoiselle Salle it has been well said: *"Que tous ses pas étaient des sentiments,"* and of Berenice I more seriously believed *que tous ses dents étaient des idées! Des idées!*—ah, here was the idiotic thought that destroyed me! *Des idées!*—ah, *therefore* it was that I coveted them so madly! I felt that their possession could alone ever restore me to peace, in giving me back to reason.

And the evening closed in upon me thus—and then the darkness came, and tarried, and went—and the day again dawned—and the mists of a second night were now gathering around—and still I sat motionless in that solitary room—and still I sat buried in meditation—and still the *phantasma* of the teeth maintained its terrible ascendency, as, with the most vivid and hideous distinctness, it floated about amid the changing lights and shadows of the chamber. At length there broke in upon my dreams a cry as of hor-

ror and dismay; and thereunto, after a pause, succeeded the sound of troubled voices, intermingled with many low moanings of sorrow or of pain. I arose from my seat, and throwing open one of the doors of the library, saw standing out in the antechamber a servant maiden, all in tears, who told me that Berenice was—no more! She had been seized with epilepsy in the early morning, and now, at the closing in of the night, the grave was ready for its tenant, and all the preparations for the burial were completed.

* * * * * * *

I FOUND myself sitting in the library, and again sitting there alone. It seemed to me that I had newly awakened from a confused and exciting dream. I knew that it was now midnight, and I was well aware, that since the setting of the sun, Berenice had been interred. But of that dreary period which intervened I had no positive, at least no definite, comprehension. Yet its memory was replete with horror—horror more horrible from being vague, and terror more terrible from ambiguity. It was a fearful page in the record of my existence, written all over with dim, and hideous, and unintelligible recollections. I strived to decipher them, but in vain; while ever and anon, like the spirit of a departed sound, the shrill and piercing shriek of a female voice seemed to be ringing in my ears. I had done a deed—what was it? I asked myself the question aloud, and the whispering echoes of the chamber answered me—*"What was it?"*

On the table beside me burned a lamp, and near it lay a little box. It was of no remarkable character, and I had seen it frequently before, for it was the property of the family physician; but how came it *there,* upon my table, and why did I shudder in regarding it? These things were in no manner to be accounted for, and my eyes at length dropped to the open pages of a book, and to a sentence underscored therein. The words were the singular but simple ones of the poet Ebn Zaiat:—*"Dicebant mihi sodales si sepulchrum amicae visitarem, curas aliquantulum fore levates."* Why, then, as I perused them, did the hairs of my head erect themselves on end, and the blood of my body become congealed within my veins?

There came a light tap at the library door—and, pale as the tenant of a tomb, a menial entered upon tiptoe. His looks were wild with terror, and he spoke to me in a voice tremulous, husky, and very low. What said he?—some broken sentences I heard. He told of a wild cry disturbing the silence of the night—of the gathering together of the household—of a search in the direction of the sound; and then his tones grew thrillingly distinct as he whispered me of a violated grave—of a disfigured body shrouded, yet still breathing—still palpitating—*still alive!*

He pointed to my garments; they were muddy and clotted with gore. I spoke not, and he took me gently by the hand: it was indented with the impress of human nails. He directed my attention to some object against the wall. I looked at it for some minutes: it was a spade. With a shriek I bounded to the table, and grasped the box that lay upon it. But I could not force it open; and, in my tremor, it slipped from my hands, and fell heavily, and burst into pieces; and from it, with a rattling sound, there rolled out some instruments of dental surgery, intermingled with thirty-two small, white, and ivory-looking substances that were scattered to and fro about the floor.

Coming Next Month

"THE trial? Why, it was no real trial, Master, just a hideous farce. We were charged with every known crime. They said we drank the blood of children, consorted with the Devil, attended a strange thing they called the Black Mass, worked desperately against the good of the country. Of course, we were declared guilty—we were not even allowed to defend ourselves—Giles was killed in the court because he asked permission to speak in our defense. Still, he said some words even as he died—you would have been proud of little Giles had you seen him that day—always so timid, but then he cursed the Bishop and the King and the Cardinal and all the Unholy Band, and even as he died he told them of a monster that would destroy the land. Doubtless he raved in his death agony, but it was a brave sight to see him dare tell such things to the King, even as he bled to death.

"Giles' wife was there and heard all he said, and as he quieted in death she turned to me and whispered, 'That is the kind of a brave man I married!' and, with a dagger snatched from a soldier's belt, she killed herself, but she kissed her poor man ere she died.

"They all died. By fire and steel and drowning they died, and only I remain of all those fair young men you taught your wisdom to. They were going to cut me up piecemeal. First they killed my wife—she was with child—then they cut off my left hand. . . .

"Slowly, through the mountain passes and along the river, I made my way to you and Castle Doom. There is nothing more for me to tell you—that is what happened. We will spare the telling of details—imagine the worst and that will tell you what happened."

The grief-stricken man looked silently to the east over the desolate sea. The Master Magician sighed.

"The work of years destroyed in one day," he whispered. "Nothing remains to repay the effort of years." . . .

You will want to read this thrilling fantasy about a monster so vast that forests grew upon its back and people dwelt unsuspecting in towns on its hide—when suddenly the monster stirred. It will be printed complete in next month's WEIRD TALES:

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By Hugh B. Cave

A sensational story of the Undead—a beautiful vampire doomed to prey upon the living.

Another thrilling installment of

THE DEVIL'S BRIDE
By Seabury Quinn

May WEIRD TALES Out April 1

(Continued from page 438)

side, New Jersey, "if they would like to have a little more poetry than is usually inserted? I know that I for one, being of a poetic nature, would like to see more weird verse included in the magazine."

"I pride myself that I am a realist, believing only what I see and what I can hold in my hand," writes Fred King Newburn, of Grove, Oklahoma. "But such stories as the quaint, weirdly suggestive *Abductor Minimi Digit,* with its trick O. Henry ending, caused me moments of doubt—like the atheist in the dark."

Clark Ashton Smith writes in a letter to the editor: "I have just finished the February WEIRD TALES. All the stories are entertaining, though of course, as usual, I have my preferences. *The Tree-men of M'Bwa* is truly weird and conspicuous for originality, and *The Thing on the Roof,* though far from novel in its plot, is impressively told, with a genuine *frisson* at the ending. *Devouring Shadows* is an admirable weird-scientific story, and the author avoids the common error of too much pseudo-technical explanation. *Night and Silence* and *The Horror in the Hold* are excellent, though both are *contes cruels* rather than weird tales in the strictest sense. Like many of your readers, I think that one or two scientific tales in an issue should be enough. It is also well to put in one or two tales dealing with physical as opposed to supernatural horror; and I think that a representative number of WEIRD TALES should include at least one fantasy of poetic and atmospheric type. The balance of the stories should be tales of sheer weirdness and pure terror—which implies the presence or advent of the supernatural and the supermundane."

Readers, which story do you like best in this issue? *The Tree-Men of M'Bwa* by Donald Wandrei and the first installment of Seabury Quinn's serial, *The Devil's Bride,* are leading in popularity in our February issue as we go to press with the April number of the magazine.

MY FAVORITE STORIES IN THE APRIL WEIRD TALES ARE:

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The Red Witch

(Continued from page 458)

ets. And swiftly following came his counterstroke. He delivered it horizontally at my head, but I bent my knees quickly, and the club barely grazed my hair. The momentum of his blow turned him a trifle, and I swiped back again with the ax, and that time, despite his backward leap, the ax drew blood from his side; not a deep cut, but still enough to madden him.

With a snarl of pure fiendishness he drove in a blow I could not evade, so lightning-swift it came. Fairly on my left arm it landed, and my whole side went numb as if suddenly paralyzed. I had only my right arm then with which to wield that ponderous stone war-ax, while my eon-old enemy still had two arms with which to swing his no less ponderous club.

The derisive sneer on his hateful face drove me beyond all semblance of caution. As if it had been naught but a light throwing-hatchet, I whirled up that great stone-headed ax in one hand and hurled it! So quickly did I move that he had no chance to raise his club in order to ward off that hurtling weapon.

Edge first it struck him in his barrel-like chest, driving deep in through flesh and bone. With a bubbling grunt the breath went out of his lungs, followed by a gush of bloody froth. He threw both arms across his torso, hugging the ax-handle in his agony. . . .

The cracked voice of old Juhor rang out: "When Athak's wife returns to Athak's embrace, then shall the age-old curse lift; and Athak shall cease to dwell in outer darkness! *Athak the Mighty, get thee*

(Please turn to page 576)

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(Continued from page 575)

hence to the place appointed for all such as thou!"

The giant stood swaying, his arms still clasping the handle of the ax. But as Juhor spoke his doom, he tottered and fell!

Unheeding aught else, I staggered wearily—for my strength left me even as Athak fell—over to where Rhoda lay, lifted her to the bed and turned—to see only a faint haze where a moment before had lain the gigantic materialized form of Athak the Terrible! As I looked, the haze vanished, too. Of old Juhor the Snake there was no sign. There remained only the carcass of an enormous, dead dog; an empty automatic pistol; and a great, ivory-handled war-ax lying where I had dropped it. Oh, yes! And a great bruise on my left arm. . . .

What is real, and what illusion, in this universe? Nobody knows, I least of all.

Juhor handed me that ax. I used it. Next day I hung it on the wall in my study. And that same evening I read in the newspaper that a jade-headed, ivory-handled battle-ax had been mysteriously abstracted some time in the night hours from a glass case in a scientific museum located over eight hundred miles from where I dwell, and had been missed the same morning I hung it on my wall! And the glass case had not been broken into, nor unlocked.

The news article went on to state that the weapon owed its remarkable condition of preservation to the fact that it had been found fast-frozen in a huge fragment of ice that had "calved" from a glacier up under the Arctic Circle. . . .

Oh, my very soul faints when I try to make coherence of my jumbled data! Yet out of it all, dimly I get this for my comfort: Time, and Space, both are as naught to the Self of man. Justice endures and Love is eternal; nor shall all the Powers of Darkness ever prevail against them!

W. T.—9

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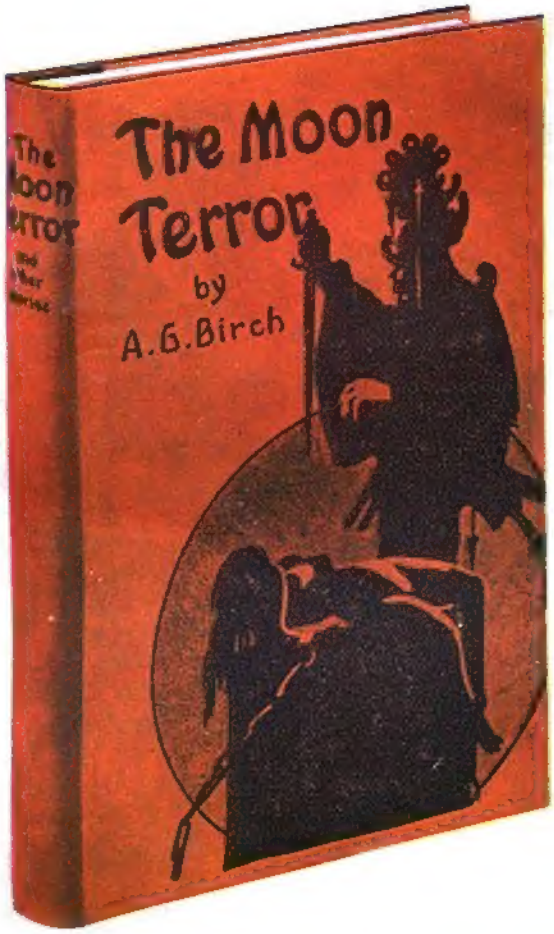

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